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WAR TIME SILHOUETTES

STEPHEN HUDSON

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WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES



WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

BY

STEPHEN HUDSON



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. MR. REISS'S FINAL GRIEVANCE	7
II. IN THE TRUE INTEREST OF THE NATION	25
III. WAR WORK	65
IV. BUSINESS IS BUSINESS	83
V. "BOBBY"	103
VI. A WAR VICTIM	181
VII. DULCE ET DECORUM	199

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MR. REISS'S FINAL GRIEVANCE



WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

I

MR. REISS'S FINAL GRIEVANCE

MR. ADOLF REISS, merchant, sits alone on a gloomy December afternoon. He gazes into the fire with jaundiced eyes reflecting on his grievance against Life. The room is furnished expensively but arranged without taste, and it completely lacks home atmosphere. Mr. Reiss's room is, like himself, uncomfortable. The walls are covered with pictures, but their effect is unpleasing; perhaps this is because they were bought by him as reputed bargains, sometimes at forced sales of bankrupt acquaintances.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

Making and thinking about money has not left Mr. Reiss time to consider comfort, but for Art, in the form of pictures and other saleable commodities, he has a certain respect. Such things if bought judiciously have been known to increase in value in the most extraordinary manner, and as this generally happens long after their creators are dead, he leaves living artists severely alone. The essence of successful speculation is to limit your liability.

Mr. Reiss is a short, stoutish, ungainly man past seventy, and he suffers from chronic indigestion. He is one of those people of whom it is difficult to believe that they ever were young.

But it is not on account of these disadvantages that Mr. Reiss considers himself ill treated by Fate. It is because since the War he regards himself as a ruined

MR. REISS'S FINAL GRIEVANCE

man. Half his fortune remains ; but Mr. Reiss, though he hates the rich, despises the merely well-off. Of a man whose income would generally be considered wealth he says, "Bah ! He hasn't a penny." Below this level every one is "a pauper" ; now he rather envies such pitiable people because "they've got nothing to lose." His philosophy of life is simple to grasp, and he can never understand why so many people refuse to accept it. If they did, he thinks that the world would not be such an unpleasant place to live in. Life in his opinion is simply a fight for money. All the trouble in the world is caused by the want of it, all the happiness man requires can be purchased with it. Those who think the contrary are fools, and if they go to the length of professing indifference to money they are "humbugs."

"Humbug" and "Bunkum" are favourite

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

words of his. He generally dismisses remarks and stops discussion by the use of either or both. His solitary term of praise is the word "respectable" and he uses it sparingly, being as far as he can conscientiously go in approval of any one; he thus eulogizes those who live within their means and have never been known to be hard up. People who are hard up are "wasters." No one has any business to be hard up; "respectable" men live on what they've got. If any one were to ask him how people are to live within their means when they've not got any, he would reply with the word "bunkum" and clinch the argument with a grunt. It will be understood that conversation with Mr. Adolf Reiss is not easy.

A knock on the door. Mr. Reiss's

MR. REISS'S FINAL GRIEVANCE

servant announces some one and withdraws.

Intuitively Mr. Reiss, who is rather deaf, and has not caught the name, grasps the paper and hides behind it. From long experience he has discovered the utility of the newspaper as a sort of parapet behind which he can better await attack.

A slight figure in khaki advances into the room, observes the newspaper above the legs and smiles slightly.

“Hello, uncle!” It’s a fresh young voice.

Mr. Reiss grunts, slowly lowers the paper and gazes at the youth over his eyeglasses.

“Oh, it’s you. When did you come up?”

“Just arrived, uncle. We’re ordered out. I thought I’d look you up at once as there are one or two things——”

“Eh—what?”

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

Among Mr. Reiss's characteristics is a disconcerting habit of making people repeat their remarks. This is deliberate and its purpose twofold—to gain time and to embarrass the person addressed.

The young fellow sits down rather uncomfortably and begins again—

“We're ordered out, you know——”

“No, I didn't know. How could I? You never write——”

Mr. Reiss consolidates his defence with the pretence of a grievance.

“I didn't know myself until yesterday. They don't give one much time, you know.”

“They—who?”

“The War Office people. You see, our first battalion has had a lot of casualties and three of us subs are being taken from the third. We've got to join the day after to-morrow. Bit of a rush. And

MR. REISS'S FINAL GRIEVANCE

I've got things to get. I'm afraid I must ask you to give me a leg up, uncle. I'm a bit short——”

“Short? Why, you've got an ample allowance besides your pay and the Government pays for your outfit at an extravagant rate.” Mr. Reiss never ceases denouncing the extravagance of the Government. He now adjusts his glasses and glowers at the youngster, who fidgets under the scrutiny.

“Yes, I know. I——” he stammers.

“Well—well?”

“The fact is—when Staples, our captain, went back—he—I——”

A grunt. Then, “Eh—what?”

“He was engaged, you know.”

“Well—well?” irritably.

“I can't explain, uncle, if you don't give me a chance.”

Another grunt.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

“Jimmie—I mean Staples—wanted to give his girl a ring before he went back. He hadn’t enough money—so I lent him fifty pounds.”

Mr. Reiss drops his glasses, gets up from his chair, and stands before the fire, facing his nephew.

“So you lent him fifty pounds, did you? A third of your annual allowance. You had no business to—and if Captain Whatever’s - his - name were a respectable man, he would have saved the money to pay for the ring. Instead of that *I* have to pay for it.”

“Oh no, uncle.”

“How d’you mean—‘no, uncle’? Aren’t you asking me for money? It’s always the same story with the lot of you. You like to be generous at other people’s expense. I’ve told you I’m a ruined man. The fortune which was the result of my hard

MR. REISS'S FINAL GRIEVANCE

work all my life has disappeared. I'm a poor man. I spend nothing on myself. I've given up my car. I've put down everything. I'm trying to dispose of my pictures and to sell the lease of this place. You don't seem to understand what this infernal war means to people like myself. *You* don't have to pay for it. Do you realize that one-third of my entire income goes for income tax? I've paid your bills over and over again, but I can't do it any more. For this once I'll——"

The boy holds up his hand.

"Look here, uncle. I'd better tell you at once. I shall need another fifty to make me square. But I'll pay you back——on my honour——"

"Bah! Your honour! Pay me back. I know what that means. So it's a hundred pounds you want. Very well. You shall have your hundred pounds. But

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

I solemnly warn you that it's the last penny I intend to pay for your extravagance. As for that waster of a Captain What's-his——"

The boy flushes to the roots of his light, wavy hair.

"I say, uncle. He's not a waster. He's the finest fellow in the regiment. I can't allow you—— Look here—never mind the money. The jeweller knows it's all right. I'd rather——"

He stops. The words won't come. He gazes at his uncle helplessly. Mr. Reiss goes slowly to the writing-table and sits down. Taking a blank cheque from a pocket-book he always carries, he fills it in and passes it to the boy without speaking.

"I don't like taking it, uncle. I don't, really——"

Mr. Reiss half turns round. He still

MR. REISS'S FINAL GRIEVANCE

says nothing, he does not even grunt. He knows that there are times when silence is golden. Moreover, he knows that money talks.

A few minutes later Mr. Adolf Reiss is again sitting alone, gazing into the fire. And he has another grievance against Life.

The philosophy of Mr. Reiss is a natural result of his early environment. In Magdeburg, where he was born and brought up, education in business principles is combined with the theory of family duty. Whether this theory takes the place of affection or not, its application in the case of Mr. Reiss resulted in his migration at an early age to England, where he soon found a market for his German industry, his German thriftiness, and his German astuteness. He established a busi-

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

ness and took out naturalization papers. Until the War came Mr. Reiss was growing richer and richer. His talent for saving kept pace with his gift for making.

He spent evening after evening, when he came home from the City, thinking out different ways of tying up his fortune on Percy, so that it could remain intact as long as possible. Some of his schemes for insuring the safety of his capital, for the resettlement of the greater part of the income by trustees—for combining, in fact, a maximum of growing power for the fortune with a minimum of enjoyment for the heir—were really marvels of ingenuity.

But since the War his thoughts have taken a different turn. Half his fortune has gone. He is too old now to catch up again. It's all over with money-making. The most he can hope for is to keep "the little that is left." If only Percy had

MR. REISS'S FINAL GRIEVANCE

been older and had a son, he could settle the money upon his great-nephew. Then there would have been time for the money to accumulate again.

And now he's gone to the Front. He might be killed. It doesn't bear thinking about. He has toiled all his life. Surely after *all* his self-sacrifice and self-denial he is not to be robbed of the one satisfaction he asks for, to know that the beggarly remains of his wealth shall be safe after his own death.

Every day he scans the papers anxiously. His one preoccupation is the daily casualty list.

Spring is at hand, and though there is chill in the air Mr. Reiss is economical and sits before an empty grate. Self-mortification always seems to him to be evidence of moral superiority and to confirm

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

his right to special grievances. He is reading a letter over again received that morning from Percy. It bears the stamp of the Base Censor and is some days old.

DEAR UNCLE ADOLF,

You remember my friend Jimmy Staples—the one I told you about who was engaged and I lent that money to? Well, he's been killed, or rather he has just died of wounds. He has done splendidly. Our Brigadier had sent in his name for a V.C. I'll tell you all about it when I see you. But what I wanted to say is that it's all right about the money. I've got lots in the bank now, and in another couple of months I shall be able to pay you back. One can't spend anything much out here. I'm quite fit, but I'm rather in the blues about Jimmy. Mother will give you all my news.

Your affectionate Nephew.

P.S.—By the way, I gave your name as nearest relative in case of accidents, to save mother.

Mr. Reiss has a curious and unaccus-

MR. REISS'S FINAL GRIEVANCE

tomed feeling of flatness as he re-reads the letter. Somehow or other he does not want Percy to pay him back that fifty pounds. He thinks he'll write and tell him so at once.

He sits down at the writing-table—the same one at which he had written the cheque the last time he saw Percy. The scene comes back to him with a strange vividness as he dips his pen in the ink. He hesitates a moment before beginning the letter. Was there anything he could say that would please Percy? He has a curious and at the same time a strong desire to do something now—at once. He has never felt like this before. Supposing he were to—— A knock on the door. His servant brings in a telegram. Why do Mr. Reiss's fingers tremble so? Why does Mr. Reiss begin cleaning his glasses before he opens the envelope?

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

He holds the pink paper under the lamp.

Deeply regret to inform you . . .

Mr. Adolf Reiss does not need to read farther, and now he has a final grievance against Life.

**IN THE TRUE INTEREST OF
THE NATION**



II

IN THE TRUE INTEREST OF THE NATION

SIR MATTHEW BALE, baronet and Member of Parliament, appears to be, at first sight, a distinguished person. When you know him better, you ask yourself what misled you, and you reconsider his personality. Careful scrutiny reveals that he is a skilful imitation. On the other hand, he is not just a façade, for there is will behind the mask. His imitation is, in fact, the result of an endeavour to be, not merely to appear, distinguished, and he fails because, while the manner is there, the moral

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

qualities which should support it are not. Though he does not know it, this failure to realize his own ideal of himself is the fly in the amber. Sir Matthew was an ambitious man, and believed that all that was necessary in order to "arrive" was to will it sufficiently. Up to a point his career supports his theory, but not altogether; for while, considering where he began, he has climbed to a considerable height, Sir Matthew is very far from satisfied with his position.

Sir Matthew is wily, but he is not able, and he is exceedingly ignorant; this ignorance even extends to matters in which he is directly and personally interested. In most men this defect would have proved an insuperable obstacle to success, but it has not been so with Sir Matthew because he is aware of his own shortcomings, and when he can't do a thing himself he

IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION

is exceedingly good at getting some one to do it for him.

Nobody knows anything about his origin, but he began to make his living at an early age, and while still in the twenties he was doing well as a bookmaker.

Reggy Dumbarton owed him a good deal more money than he could ever have paid, so, on reflection, Bale turned his back on bookmaking and started finance with large plate-glass windows in Threadneedle Street, and Lord Reginald Dumbarton as junior (very junior) partner.

The Dumbarton connection made the new office a rendezvous for young bloods whose profession in life it is to induce their friends to cultivate a taste for speculative investment. The growth of the business demanding a wider financial knowledge than Bale's bookmaking experience could supply, his discriminating eye discovered a

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

promising additional partner in the person of Maurice Blum, who had survived two startling bankruptcies and an action against him for fraud. Bale, Dumbarton, and Blum now did so thriving a business that Bale started an elegantly appointed flat in Mayfair, drove a phaeton and pair (it was before the days of motors), and was much about town with gentlemen of family to whom his partnership with Dumbarton afforded a useful and easy introduction. An indication that at this time he was among the minor celebrities may be found in the fact that a flattering caricature of him appeared in *Vanity Fair*.

When his engagement was announced to Dumbarton's cousin, Lady Ermyntrude Stanley-Dalrymple, elder daughter of Lord Belfast, a social personage and a power in the inner councils of the Conservative Party, it was suggested that there might

IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION

be some connection between this rather unexpected event and Lord Belfast's heavy losses on the Stock Exchange and subsequent directorships and holdings of shares in his future son-in-law's companies. Whether this supposition was well founded or not, it can be said with certainty that Bale had secured at one stroke a footing in society and in politics, for shortly after his marriage to Lady Ermyntrude his father-in-law found him a safe seat in Parliament.

Meanwhile Mr. Maurice Blum, who in the absence of his chief partner had been looking after himself as well as the business, presented an ultimatum. If Mr. Bale wanted to be a politician, Blum had no objection, but that meant, at all events at first, spending money instead of making it, and under the circumstances the terms of the partnership must be modified.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

This was the nastiest blow Bale had yet received. He had regarded Blum as his creature, and his resentment at what he considered his partner's treachery was deep. But his prudence and astuteness did not fail him; he knew Blum's value, and he was aware that even if he were himself able to spare the time from his political activities, his knowledge was not sufficient to enable him to manage the growing business of the firm.

In Bale's view wealth is a necessary accompaniment of distinction. He longed to be aristocratically indifferent to money, and it humiliated him that not only was he not rich, but that to keep up the style of living his position demanded involved no inconsiderable strain. And, as a matter of fact, his financial position was precarious and depended entirely upon the fluctuating and speculative income he de-

IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION.

rived from the business of Blum & Co. Obviously, therefore, Mr. Maurice Blum was not a person with whom Bale could afford to quarrel. Wherefore he mastered his resentment and accepted the change of the name of the firm to Blum & Co., and the incidental reduction of his income that change implied with a smile on his face in spite of the bitterness in his heart.

To a man less adroit than he, the change in the partnership might well have constituted a serious check in his upward career, but once more Bale's native resourcefulness asserted itself. This crisis in his private affairs took place when the country was torn by dissensions over Tariff Reform. He had early learnt to fish in troubled waters, and the political upheaval gave him his opportunity; he promptly crossed the floor of the House

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

and obtained, without paying for it, a baronetcy as his reward.

Sir Matthew Bale is tall and slender ; his head is well placed on his shoulders, he has clear-cut features, a firm mouth with excellent teeth, and is clean-shaven. Although he is over fifty, he has plenty of hair, originally sandy, but now tinged with grey, which he parts at the side and brushes straight back from the forehead. He dresses with a certain quiet elegance, and he has a way of drawing down his cuffs as he talks to you, and of placing the tips of his fingers together so that you notice his nicely kept nails. He speaks in a low tone, which he only raises when he forgets himself, and relies for emphasis on little restrained gestures adopted by him, together with other tricks of speech and manner, from his wife's

IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION

male relations. In this he is unconscious of imitation, for he is by nature adaptable and his desire to be identified with the aristocracy is instinctive.

He has now associated himself with the extreme Radical and Labour wing, where it flatters his vanity to think he is regarded as an elegant exotic. A constant saying of his is "Keep your eye on labour," but, though they don't say so, the Labour Members keep their eye on him and regard his advances with distrust.

He has been active on departmental committees, and has on occasion served as chairman. It did not need a long experience to teach him that whatever the ostensible object of these convenient arrangements may be, their usual purpose is to throw dust in the eyes of the public, to burke discussion, and to save the face of embarrassed ministers. Therefore, when-

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

ever he was appointed, his first step was invariably to make certain what the wish of the minister was who nominated him.

Possessing such qualities it was no surprise to those who knew the considerations involved when he was made chairman of the Government Committee "to consider and report on the measures to be adopted during the war with reference to the commercial, industrial, and financial interests of British subjects in neutral countries."

This was by far the most important committee over which Sir Matthew had ever presided, and he cherished the hope that by means of it he might secure the immediate desire of his heart, a Privy Councillorship; once a "Right Honourable" he could aspire to anything—a seat in the Cabinet, or, if Blum & Co. pros-

IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION

pered, a peerage even. Sir Matthew's heart leaped at the thought of a coronet.

About this time Oswald Tarleton was sent for by his chief, and informed that he had been selected for the secretaryship of Sir Matthew Bale's committee.

"This is a very weighty committee, Mr. Tarleton," said the permanent secretary of the department. "The Government's policy in regard to enemy trading and proceedings under the Defence of the Realm Act will largely depend upon the result of its deliberations. In Sir Matthew Bale I have every reason for believing that you will find a most able, and at the same time a most agreeable, chairman."

Oswald Tarleton went off delighted. Although he had been for twenty years a highly conscientious departmental official, and had received nothing but praise for

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

his services, he was too much a gentleman to push himself, and this modesty had resulted in his never being given an opportunity of showing how competent a public servant he really was.

Now, Tarleton is an honest man and something of an idealist. His first interview with Sir Matthew Bale made him open his eyes wider than ever in his life before.

The chairman settled himself in his chair opposite his secretary, pulled down his cuffs, put the tips of his fingers together, and held forth.

“Mr. Tarleton, we have got to make a success of this committee. I need hardly tell you how important it is and that upon it depend vital questions of Government policy. I am not going too far in saying that the future of the Government itself depends to a large

IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION

extent upon the guidance which we shall be able to afford them as the result of our labours."

Sir Matthew, as a rule, expressed himself badly, but he had been at pains to prepare a little set speech with which to impress his secretary, who now sat looking at him, silently meditating over the pompous utterance, and wondering what was coming next.

"I understand, Mr. Tarleton," the chairman continued, "that you have not hitherto had any experience as secretary of committees?"

"Oh yes, Sir Matthew, excuse me——"

"I mean," interrupted the chairman, "of Government committees. Now, this one has been appointed by the Prime Minister himself, and I think I may say without indiscretion that he has largely consulted me as to its composition. The—er—terms

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

of reference will indicate to you that the subject of our deliberations is a delicate one, and that it will be necessary for us to remember that a grave responsibility rests upon us in the selection of our witnesses. In other words, Mr. Tarleton"—the chairman leaned back in his seat and scrutinized his secretary—"we must, in the true interest of the nation—for of course that is the paramount consideration—be careful to avoid anything in the nature of disclosures which at this critical juncture might — er—undermine the—er—confidence which rightly is reposed in the Government. D'you follow me, Mr. Tarleton?"

The secretary hesitated for a moment.

"Do you mean, Sir Matthew, that we are not to accept evidence——"

"I mean, Mr. Tarleton, that we must discriminate in the selection of our witnesses before we decide to call them.

IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION

You are aware, perhaps, that I am in the confidence of the Labour Party, and you will notice that amongst the members of the committee there are three prominent Labour Members. Now you will understand that—er—er—while I have the greatest—er—respect for the views of these—er—er—gentlemen, there are limits to the influence I possess with them, and it is in the highest degree desirable that no witness should come before them who would be likely to prejudice in their eyes those who—er—indirectly perhaps have—er—associations or connections—er—political or otherwise, in the highest quarters.”

“But excuse me, Sir Matthew, I thought——”

“No ‘buts,’ Mr. Tarleton; no thoughts except on the lines indicated by me.”

Oswald Tarleton withdrew from this preliminary interview with mingled feelings,

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

but uppermost there was already vaguely forming itself in his mind a profound distrust, and still more a cordial dislike, of Sir Matthew Bale.

A recent and somewhat acrimonious debate in the House of Commons had precipitated the formation of this committee, and had unduly hastened the selection of its members. Sir Matthew had been called in at short notice as being, in the opinion of the minister who had been under criticism, the most pliant chairman available.

The proceedings of the Committee were to be hurried on as much as possible. This much Tarleton had gathered from his departmental chief, and there was no doubt that he would have his hands full. He had had opportunity of gauging the political qualities of Sir Matthew Bale; at his next interview he was enabled to

IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION

form an opinion of his administrative methods. He was again seated opposite the chairman, who leaned back in his chair with an air of indolent ease. Tarleton was pointing out to him the considerable difficulty there would be in staffing the committee owing to the demands upon the department through the War. There was also, he explained, the troublesome question of securing accommodation, for which there was no room at the Government Office. Sir Matthew loftily waved aside these difficulties.

“As to accommodation, Mr. Tarleton,” he said, “just tell the Office of Works that it is the Prime Minister’s wish that I should have every facility, and as to staff, look at these.” As he spoke he touched a bundle of papers which lay on the table. “You have choice enough there, Mr. Tarleton.”

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

Tarleton had seen the papers ; in fact, he had placed them on the table himself after carefully going through them. They were applications from all sorts of individuals offering their voluntary services. There were letters from retired officers, judges, tea-planters, cowboys, fellows of the Universities—in fact, the usual heterogeneous collection with which those who have Government work to do are familiar since the War.

“It is very doubtful, Sir Matthew, whether any of these gentlemen would be suitable for this sort of work. You will, I am sure, understand that a certain training——”

“Oh, never mind the training, Mr. Tarleton. I’ll soon select somebody for you—let me have a look through them. Now, here’s one—this is the sort of man that I like ; he telegraphs—he doesn’t write. A man with individuality — an original mind. Try him.”

IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION

“Excuse me, Sir Matthew, have you noticed the name?”

Sir Matthew put on his eyeglass and examined the telegram.

“Louis Klein,” he read, “and a very good name too—what’s the matter with it?”

“D’you think it advisable, Sir Matthew, in the present state of public opinion——”

“Public opinion, Mr. Tarleton, means the Press, and that doesn’t concern *us*. The true interests of the nation are our concern, and in this case I see no reason whatever why, because this man’s name is Klein—— As a matter of fact, when I was dining with a member of the Cabinet a few evenings ago, I met a most charming person called Schmerz, and, I have reason for knowing, a most loyal subject. Indeed, I understand that my friend the minister finds his advice most useful in certain

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

cases. No, no, by all means send for this Mr. Klein—let's have a look at him."

Mr. Klein arrived, and Oswald Tarleton was not favourably impressed by him. He had thick features and a generally unattractive appearance ; he spoke, too, with an accent which Tarleton distrusted, although Klein assured him that he was a French Alsatian, and as proof thereof showed the secretary a letter from the French Embassy which vouched for his being a devoted citizen of the Republic. Sir Matthew entirely approved of him.

"Just the man we want, Mr. Tarleton. Make him assistant secretary. That'll flatter him—then ask anything you like of him and he'll do it. That's my way."

Presently Klein was installed and Tarleton soon found him a most assiduous and useful assistant. Without the loss of a

IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION

moment he got into touch with various chiefs of subsidiary departments and obtained stenographers and typewriters, clerks and porters. Urged by Sir Matthew, he harried the Office of Works till they provided ample accommodation in a fine building in a central position; from H.M. Stationery Office he promptly ordered all sorts of indispensable supplies, and within an incredibly short time Sir Matthew found himself installed in sumptuous offices with a fine committee-room and everything in as perfect order as even he could desire. Tarleton was compelled to admit that Klein had proved to be an acquisition.

“What did I tell you?” cried Sir Matthew triumphantly. “Trust me to find the right man, Mr. Tarleton, trust me. I always believe in demanding the impossible and I generally get it. If you’re modest, you get left.”

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

Tarleton could vouch for the truth of this observation, and he disliked the chairman more than ever.

In due course the committee held its first sitting. On Sir Matthew's right sat Lord Milford, a wealthy peer of independent political opinions and great obtuseness, by whose social prestige Sir Mathew was greatly impressed; on his left Mr. Doubleday, the leader of the Labour Party in the House of Commons. Ranged on either side, according to their importance, sat the various other members of the committee.

Sir Matthew's opening address, written for him by Tarleton, met with an excellent reception, and the proceedings developed smoothly.

As the weeks passed the work of the committee increased, especially that part

IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION

of it which fell to the staff. Tarleton was worked off his legs. In committee Sir Matthew was indisputably an adroit chairman. He knew how to assert himself on occasion and play off the members against each other, and he showed the dexterity of a conjurer in manipulating evidence. But outside the committee-room, entirely absorbed by the decorative side of his position, he talked and talked from morning till evening. Beyond receiving important persons, he did nothing. He was as incapable of composing a letter as of making a speech, and Tarleton had to write both for him. He would arrive in the morning when Tarleton was trying to get on with urgent correspondence or to frame questions to be asked of witnesses, and so take up his unfortunate secretary's time that it was almost impossible for him to get his work finished for the next meeting.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

He made the most exacting demands upon his overworked staff, showing as little consideration for them as he did grasp of the mass of detail they had to get through between committee meetings. Indeed, had it not been for the industrious energy of Klein, who had relieved him of practically all the routine work, ordinary correspondence and office supervision, Tarleton had to admit to himself that it would have been beyond his power to carry on.

As the proceedings of the committee advanced, Sir Matthew's opinion of his own importance increased, and Tarleton's dislike of him grew into hatred. Gentle, unassuming, and sensitive, he had never so far encountered an individual like Sir Matthew Bale, who outraged all his finer feelings and susceptibilities a dozen times a day. And the secretary

IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION

swore between his teeth that if he ever got the chance of tripping him up, once the committee was done with, he would take good care not to miss it.

Klein, on the other hand, grew in Tarleton's esteem, and he felt he had done him an injustice, for which he was determined to atone if occasion offered.

The industry of the Alsatian was equalled by his perspicacity; he soon fathomed the intentions of the chairman and understood that the chief purpose of the committee was the exact opposite of that which its flowing terms of reference were intended to convey.

In a small room, as far as possible removed from the one in which the committee had their meetings, Klein sat like a mole delving into documents and preparing the interim report for which the Government had been pressed in

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

Parliament. Here, when the day was over and Sir Matthew had at last taken his departure, Tarleton would join him. It frequently happened that they did not finish their labours until nearly midnight. On such occasions Tarleton would go to his club to dine, whilst Klein would make his way to some neighbouring restaurant, but after a time the two men seemed to draw nearer to each other, until one day Tarleton suggested that Klein should dine with him. Over a cigar in the club smoking-room, the secretary for the first time expressed himself freely to his colleague.

“I feel I ought to tell you, Klein, that at first I was foolish enough to feel a little——”

He broke off, hesitating to use a word which might hurt the other's feelings.

“I know exactly what you mean, Tarleton,

IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION

and I do not in the least blame you. You are probably not aware that many of us Alsatians have German names, but if you knew more of my life you would know what good cause I have for hating the Germans more than any Englishman can possibly hate them. Some day, perhaps, I shall have a chance of telling you."

Klein's eyes flashed under their drooping lids. Tarleton warmed to him and began to talk about the committee and especially about the chairman.

"This has been a tremendous eye-opener to me, Klein," he said. "I must tell you that, in my innocence, I never imagined that the proceedings of a committee could be conducted in such a fashion. I must confess I do not understand the object of it."

Klein smiled significantly.

"I do," he remarked.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

"What do you mean, Klein?"

"It is quite simple. There are things which the Government does not desire to be known, and that is why they selected a man like Bale for chairman. You see, Tarleton, we're accustomed to that sort of thing in France."

"But we aren't," remarked Tarleton, "and I think it's—something ought to be done," he added.

"Something can be done," said Klein.

"How?"

"I suppose you've heard of Blum & Co.?"

The secretary stared at him. "No, I've never heard of them."

"Well, Blum & Co. is Sir Matthew's firm, and Mr. Blum would be an exceedingly interesting witness."

Tarleton almost jumped out of his chair. "Good Lord!" he said excitedly, "you don't mean——"

IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION

"I mean just exactly that," Klein continued in his heavy way. "Moritz Blum is Bale's partner, and he's one of the biggest scamps in the City. Now supposing I give the tip to a member of the committee to call him."

Tarleton could hardly believe his ears. Here was retribution for Sir Matthew with a vengeance! But he hesitated.

"Would it be square, do you think? I mean, wouldn't it be treacherous towards the chairman?"

"That seems to depend upon which you put first—the chairman or the country. For my part, the only thing that matters is that if we are able to expose anything that helps the enemy, we should do so, and here's our chance."

"D'you really mean that, Klein?"

"Mean it? Of course I mean it. Blum & Co. are amongst the largest shareholders

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

in the Swedenborg Coal and Iron Smelting Company in Stockholm; they have sold and are selling thousands of tons of pig-iron to the German Government. What do you say to that?"

"How on earth do you know?" ejaculated Tarleton almost breathlessly.

Klein fixed his eyes on the other significantly.

"I haven't been in the City for twelve years for nothing," he answered.

"It's a difficult position for me." Tarleton spoke reflectively. "Loyalty to one's chairman is a tradition in the Government service. And though I despise Bale, I don't see my way to expose him. You see, it means the ruin of all his hopes."

"*Tant pis pour lui.* Doesn't he always say himself our first duty is to consider the true interest of the nation? Now, is it in the true interest of the nation that

IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION

the Germans should get this pig-iron? Tell me that, Tarleton."

The secretary made no reply. Indeed, none was needed, for the answer was obvious.

Two days later there was an important meeting of the committee, at which a full attendance had been specially requested by the chairman. A question had been raised at the previous sitting by one of the Labour Members who had desired to hear certain evidence, but the witness had suddenly left the country. The Labour Members had withdrawn to discuss the matter privately, and on their return showed that their suspicions had been aroused. On a motion by the chairman the meeting had been adjourned for four days.

All Sir Matthew's resourcefulness had been needed to avert for the time further

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

discussion. Before the next meeting he and the minister involved would get together and discover a means of putting inconvenient questioners off the scent.

The committee took their seats. The chairman now spoke in his smoothest tone, his manner was genial and urbane. He smiled towards Mr. Small, the recalcitrant committee-man, as he glanced at the notes under his hand prepared by Tarleton.

"Gentlemen, at the last meeting my friend Mr. Small took exception to the fact that a certain witness had — er — left the country—er—before we had an opportunity of examining him. I have to inform you—er—er—that certain facts have come to light regarding this witness which —er—preclude our going any further into the matter. The fact is, gentlemen"—Sir Matthew lowered his voice significantly—"he is a particular friend of the—er—

IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION

er.—diplomatic representative of a friendly Power, and I think you will agree with me that in the circumstances we had better drop any further discussion of this subject and direct the précis-writer to expunge the report of such part of our proceedings as relate to it from our minutes.”

To Sir Matthew’s surprise no dissentient voice was raised. The resolution was agreed to unanimously, and once more he congratulated himself on the skill with which he had disposed of an awkward dilemma.

“And now, gentlemen, we will call the next witness. Mr. Tarleton, will you kindly——”

“One moment please, Sir Matthew.”

The interruption was made in a very soft voice which almost lisped the words. They came from the immediate right of

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

the chairman, who turned with surprise toward the speaker, Lord Milford, who until this moment had never opened his mouth.

"I have to propose," continued the gentle voice, "that we call before us, without delay, Mr. Maurice Blum, of the firm of Blum & Co., Threadneedle Street."

Sir Matthew gasped and turned deadly pale. For an instant he felt as though he would collapse, then, summoning all his will, he fought back the emotion which was almost choking him. By a supreme effort he partially regained his self-possession and managed to assume an ordinary expression. With one rapid and comprehensive glance he took in the faces of Lord Milford and the committee, and with an immense relief told himself that they were one and all ignorant of what the proposal signified to him.

IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION

Where had Milford obtained his information? How much did he know? While these thoughts flashed through his brain the soft voice lisped on—

“Certain evidence has reached me which points to Mr. Blum’s having interests in Sweden of a character that immediately concerns our investigations. The firm are large holders of shares in a smelting concern called the Swedenborg Coal and Iron Smelting Company, and there is also a probability that Messrs. Blum’s interests extend in a direction which, though I am not suggesting disloyalty or illegality, urgently necessitates inquiry.”

Lord Milford sat down. His expression was solemn; it was evident that he was rather pleased at finding himself for once in the unusual position of having something to say and saying it. There was a buzz of whispered conversation round the

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

table, then a sudden hush—the chairman was addressing the meeting.

For a moment Sir Matthew paused. Once more his eyes took in the room. Where was the enemy? Just behind him, in his usual place, sat Tarleton at his table covered with papers. The secretary's face was white and drawn; he was twisting his small moustache nervously; his eyes were fixed on the chairman with a half-frightened expression.

Once more Sir Matthew's eyes scanned the faces. Where was the enemy? And now, at the opposite end of the table, he noticed, for the first time, a figure almost concealed behind the stout form of Mr. Small. It was Klein. The two men's eyes met. It was only for a fraction of a moment, but it was long enough. In the concentrated gaze of the Alsatian there was neither hatred nor vindictive-

IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION

ness, but only determination. The two wills were in conflict, and this time Sir Matthew knew he had met his master. In that instant he made up his mind.

“Gentlemen”—his voice was calm, his bearing unruffled; the old habit was as strong as ever, he drew down his cuffs and leaned easily on the table, spreading out his fingers—“I have a very short personal statement to make. You are perhaps unaware that I have been for many years connected with the firm of Blum & Co.; in fact, I was the original founder of the business in which for a considerable period Lord Milford’s nephew, Lord Reginald Dumbarton, was also partner.” Sir Matthew paused a moment and smiled towards his neighbour. “For some years my interest has been confined to a sleeping partnership; I have been completely ignorant of the

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

details of the business. While I need hardly tell you that the situation in which I find myself is very trying, I support Lord Milford's suggestion that the affairs of the firm shall be investigated and that Mr. Maurice Blum shall be summoned before you. But in these circumstances I have to inform you with great regret that I shall immediately place my resignation of the chairmanship in the hands of the Prime Minister. Gentlemen, may I, as my last act before leaving the chair, propose that, pending the appointment of a new chairman by the Government, Lord Milford shall take my place."

Bowing slightly to right and left and gathering up his papers, Sir Matthew walked with a dignified step to the door and disappeared.

WAR WORK

III

WAR WORK

MRS. DOBSON, though short and portly, carries her fifty-five years with buoyancy. She is a good-natured woman, with purple cheeks, a wide mouth, and a small nose ; one connects something indefinable in her appearance with church on Sundays, so that one learns without surprise that she is a strict Anglican. She lives in the neighbourhood of Cadogan Square, and has five daughters, of whom two are married, to a well-known surgeon and a minor canon respectively. The beauty of the family is Joan, who plays the piano and is considered intellectual and artistic. She

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

spent a year at the Conservatoire in Brussels, and often uses French words in conversation. Effie, the youngest, is an adept at games, and rather alarms her mother by her habit of using slang expressions and the shortness of her skirts.

Soon after the beginning of the War, Lady Whigham having discontinued her days at home, Mrs. Dobson gave up hers, and as the other ladies in her circle followed suit, her chief occupation was gone.

Of course, like her friend Lady Whigham, she joined several committees, but she was rather disappointed to find the meetings less sociable than she expected. What Mrs. Dobson likes is a friendly chat over a cup of tea; when you sit formally round a green table, you never seem to get to know any one properly.

WAR WORK

"It's so much nicer," she said to Maud, the eldest unmarried daughter, a bouncing young woman of generous proportions, "to have something at your own house. My idea is to make a pleasure of charity. The most disagreeable things can be got through pleasantly. Now, you're such a sensible girl, can't you think of something?"

Mrs. Dobson always speaks of Maud as "such a sensible girl"; spiteful people suggest that this praise is a form of apology for the absence of physical charm.

Maud meditated deeply. "Everybody seems to have thought of everything, mamma, that's the worst of it. You see, Mrs. Newt has that drawing class for orphan boys; then there's Mrs. Badger's fund for giving musical instruction to the children of soldiers and sailors, and the Parrys have dancing classes for them."

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

"That's just it. We ought to be doing something useful of that kind. It's a public duty for people in our position."

"But I think we are doing our share, mamma. What with your committee and Effie teaching those Belgian refugee children to play hockey and me at the canteen for ineligible shop assistants."

"I know, my dear. Still, it would be so nice to have something here—just to bring people together, as it were, in a cosy way."

Before any conclusion was reached tea was brought, and just then Joan came in from a concert at the Mandolin Hall, bringing a startling piece of news.

"Who do you think I met at the concert, mamma?"

Joan was evidently excited. She spoke almost breathlessly, and went on without waiting for a reply.

WAR WORK

"Jack Leclerc is back from the Front on sick leave, and he's been made a captain."

Mrs. Dobson glanced at Maud. "Really, my dear!" she said, but her voice was not cordial.

"What else did he tell you?"

"He hardly said anything. In fact, he didn't tell me even that. Mr. Mayo, the manager, saw him as we were going out and I heard him call him 'Captain'!"

"Perhaps it's a mistake, anyhow," suggested Maud.

"No, it isn't. I stopped to find out—about the next concert, I mean—and Mr. Mayo told me he had greatly distinguished himself, and I'm not a bit surprised either." And Joan looked at her mother and her sister with an air of saying, "What did I tell you?"

"Well, he's sure to come and see us

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

and tell us all about it," Mrs. Dobson remarked complacently.

"I'm not so sure of that!" Joan spoke sharply.

"Nonsense, dear! he'll be only too pleased to, especially if we ask him—and now it's war-time I think we might. Bygones are bygones."

Joan sighed deeply. It was evident she meant her mother to notice it.

"Surely you've got over that little affair? You didn't seem to mind at the time. Did you now, dear?"

"What could I do with you all against me?" Joan's face wore an expression of aggrieved reminiscence.

"We thought it for your good, Joan. He was only a music-teacher and had no means at all."

"He was getting on splendidly, though. You forget that he had been appointed

WAR WORK

conductor of a big orchestra to tour the provinces—when the War came.”

“Yes, but the War put a complete end to that and to all his prospects. A nice time you’d have had to wait,” said Maud.

“It’s over now, so what’s the good of talking about it? I daresay he’s forgotten all about me long ago.” Joan sighed again and helped herself to tea.

Half an hour later Clara Whigham called up Joan on the telephone. The family was accustomed to these conversations, which were sometimes of long duration. The two girls were intimate. It was through Clara that Joan had taken piano lessons at the Royal School of Music from Jack Leclerc.

When Joan left the room Mrs. Dobson turned to her elder daughter.

“Now, Maud, you’re such a sensible girl—what do you think about this young

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

man turning up? He's sure to be after Joan again, don't you think?"

Maud considered the question with her usual conscientious earnestness, while her mother sat anxiously watching her.

"Well, now," she said at length, "supposing he does?"

"What do you mean, Maud? I don't understand."

"Well, I mean that the War has changed everything. Look at Dora Newt. She wouldn't accept that young Mr. Firning because he was only a clerk in the bank. Now she's engaged to him, all because he's in the Army. Why, you know, mamma, Clara told you herself the other day she meant to have a War wedding."

"I must say I was shocked that so well brought up a girl should talk so lightly about marrying."

"I know, mamma, but everybody's the

WAR WORK

same now; the War makes all the difference. And I think if Joan still wants him—after all, he's a captain and——”

“I think perhaps you are right, Maud. The War does make such a difference, doesn't it? I really think I shall encourage it now that he has made a position for himself.” Mrs. Dobson was interrupted by the return of Joan with another piece of news.

“Oh, mamma,” she said, more breathlessly than ever, “Lady Whigham's going to give a concert for poor artists, and she wants us to give one, too! Isn't it a heavenly idea?”

Though Mrs. Dobson knew nothing about art, and supposed that the only reason why people ever were artists was because they were too poor to be anything else, she heartily agreed to the suggestion, coming as it did through Lady

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

Whigham, and being so exactly the form of charity that she approved.

The next morning Mrs. Dobson received a typewritten postcard—

205 CADOGAN SQUARE, S.W.

DEAR MRS. DOBSON,—

To help the artists, 2/6 teas are again being started. I am having one on Thursday the 14th. May I rely on your kind co-operation? Will you come, bring your friends, your work, have an hour's good music, tea, a chat, and feel that you are doing a great kindness to the artists?

Hoping to see you.

Yours sincerely,

CONSTANCE WHIGHAM.

Music 3.30 to 4.30.

Tea 4.30.

There was a chorus of approval round the Dobsons' breakfast-table.

Lady Whigham's concert went off with great *éclat*.

WAR WORK

It was attended by many ladies, of whom one was a dowager countess, but there were also a bishop and a midshipman. The last had a bad cold and kept on blowing his nose during the performance of the soprano, a lady of strange appearance, said to be a Serbian refugee of noble origin.

Joan did not enjoy the concert as much as the others. She said the piano-forte playing was very indifferent—she wondered what Captain Leclerc, who sat in the front row next to Clara Whigham, thought of it.

The 28th was fixed for the concert at Mrs. Dobson's. Joan would have liked to write to Jack Leclerc and ask him to recommend the artists, but she wasn't sure how he would take it, and besides, she did not know his address. Of course

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

she could have asked Clara, but somehow she did not like to.

As Lady Whigham had specially asked Mrs. Dobson to engage performers she was interested in, there was no difficulty and the day of the concert arrived.

Among the first arrivals were Lady and Miss Whigham, attended by Jack Leclerc.

Mrs. Dobson, wreathed in smiles, with Maud at her right hand, received the guests. Effie gave them tea and Joan showed them to their places.

There were five "artists." Three young men opened the performance with a trio for piano, violin, and 'cello. The ladies who had had tea knitted and conversed. When the performance was over they went into raptures about it. A middle-aged and melancholy-looking man with a beard followed. He was the feature

WAR WORK

of the occasion, having been strongly recommended by Lady Whigham as a "finished and accomplished vocalist." He sang a series of very modern French songs.

"It sounds to me as if something was wrong," commented Mrs. Dobson to Maud, who replied—

"Sh! mamma, they're not supposed to have any tune."

Lady Whigham in the front seat was applauding vigorously, so every one else, especially Mrs. Dobson, did the same, with the result that the accomplished vocalist sang them all over again, making exactly the same faces.

After that an old lady in a yellow wig livened things up with a rendering of Tosti's "Good-bye" in a cracked contralto. While the audience was applauding, Joan noticed that Jack Leclerc got up. He

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

was making his way gently to the door, evidently anxious to escape observation. Her heart was in her mouth, but she sat on stonily, determined that he should not know she had seen him.

At the door he encountered Mrs. Dobson.

"So sorry, I must run, Mrs. Dobson," he said, holding out his hand.

"Oh, I am sorry, Mr.—er—Captain Leclerc. Can't you wait till the end? Joan will be so disappointed not to see you."

"Oh, thank you. The fact is——" Leclerc stopped, looking a little embarrassed. But Mrs. Dobson did not notice this and ran on—

"And what did you think of the concert, Mr.—er—Captain Leclerc?"

The musician's professional conscience forbade a complimentary reply.

"It was very bad," he said, "except

WAR WORK

the old Frenchman. That woman had no business to sing in public, and as for those youths who call themselves artists—why aren't they in the trenches?" And hastily touching Mrs. Dobson's hand, he slipped away: the expression in her rubicund face was pained as she gazed after him.

After the concert had come to an end and the guests had gradually dispersed, Lady Whigham and Mrs. Dobson counted up the money and discussed how much each performer should receive. This *tête-à-tête* with Lady Whigham was what Mrs. Dobson most enjoyed the whole afternoon. Meanwhile Clara drew Joan aside.

"Congratulate me, dearest," she whispered. "I'm going to marry Captain Leclerc."

BUSINESS IS BUSINESS



IV

BUSINESS IS BUSINESS

STEPHEN RINGSMITH in his way is a public man, and such he likes to consider himself.

He is an art dealer in a very big way, and he is also a pillar of one of the political parties. He could have a baronetcy for the asking, but he has no children and he prefers to be a power behind the throne rather than a lackey in front of it.

Ringsmith is what is called a strong man. He knows the value of money, but he enjoys spending it. He lives in princely style, but he is not exactly a snob and he prides himself on his independence.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

His hobby is what he calls "picking winners"—men, not horses. He likes to "spot" some young fellow who he thinks has it in him to get on, then he backs him. He believes that nothing succeeds like success, having tested the truth of the saying himself. When something disagreeable has to be done, he does it and damns the consequences but he does not shrink from them.

One afternoon old Peter Knott went to see the famous art dealer. The latter was sitting in a deep leather chair with his feet near the fender, a silver tea-service resplendent under a high silver lamp beside him. To Peter Knott, as he entered, the impression was that of a comfort both solid and luxurious.

Ringsmith's strong-willed face lit up. He had much regard for Peter, in spite of the latter's being almost the only man

BUSINESS IS BUSINESS

who did not hesitate to say what he thought to him, whether palatable or not.

“Ha, old bird ! I know what you’ve come for.”

Ringsmith has a large mouth, and although he is getting towards sixty his teeth are strong and sound. His voice is loud and its tone bullying, as of one accustomed to ordering people about and to having his way. Somehow this doesn’t offend, perhaps because you expect it of a man with his red, mottled skin, bushy eyebrows, and heavy jaw.

Old Peter finished his bit of buttered toast and quietly sipped his tea.

“Yes?” he said.

“What is it this time, Peter, a box for the Red Cross Matinée or a subscription to the new fund? Come on, out with it.”

Peter screwed his single glass into one

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

of his shrewd grey eyes, and examining the muffin dish, carefully selected another piece of toast.

"Try again," he remarked.

"It's worse than I thought." The big man looked at his friend out of the corner of his eye as he put a cigar in his mouth and lighted a match. The other finished his tea and lay back in his chair.

"Not at all, not at all, Stephen. A friend of mine, Mrs. Stillwell, wants to sell her pictures."

Peter Knott has a soft, gentle voice, and he spoke slowly, looking into the fire.

"She is an old friend of mine, Mrs. Stillwell. I was best man to Tom when he married her. Lord! What a long time ago!"

Ringsmith glanced towards Peter; he said

BUSINESS IS BUSINESS

nothing, and there was a moment's silence before the latter continued—

“Tom didn't leave anything except the property, which goes to the boy; he's at the Front. There are the two girls to provide for. I advised her to sell the pictures long ago, but she couldn't bear to part with them. Now, with new taxation and so on, she feels she must. It's a bad time for selling, isn't it, Stephen?”

“The worst.”

“What do you advise?”

“I never advise; people must make up their minds for themselves.” Then, as though it were an after-thought: “What sort of pictures are they?”

“There are a Corot, a Mauve, and a Daubigny, I believe. The Corot is said to be a particularly good one.”

“Um—what does she want for them?”

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

"I don't think poor Mary has any idea about the price; she asked me, but there's one thing I won't do, and that's to be mixed up in an art deal——"

Ringsmith's eyes flashed; he flicked the ash off his cigar angrily.

"Mixed up—art deal! Then why the devil do you come to me?"

Peter Knott smiled at him benignly.

"Oh! Because you and I are old friends, Stephen. I'm sure you'll treat her better than any one else."

Ringsmith moved uneasily.

"Why don't you tell her to go to some one else first? I like people to fix their price before they come to me, then I can take it or leave it. They've got such fantastic ideas about the value of things."

"Oh, very well, if you prefer. I thought you'd be pleased I came to you, but of course——"

BUSINESS IS BUSINESS

Peter made a slight waving motion with his hand, dismissing the subject, and began talking of other things.

A quarter of an hour later he rose to go. He said good-bye, and was just leaving the room when Ringsmith called him back.

"About those pictures—I should like to oblige you, Peter."

"Yes?"

"Where can they be seen?"

Peter Knott took a half-sheet of paper from his pocket and handed it to Ringsmith without comment. Ringsmith glanced at it and threw it on the table.

"All right," he said, "leave it to me; I'll see what can be done, but these aren't times to buy, you know."

"So you said," Peter replied, and went gently out of the room.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

The next morning Ringsmith was early at his office. After looking over his letters he sent for MacTavish. The shrewd Scotsman was said to be the cleverest picture-buyer in the country. He came in, a tall, thin man, clean-shaven, with wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. Ringsmith doesn't stand on terms of ceremony with his employees: he comes to the point at once.

"D'you remember that Corot we sold to Peter Whelan of Philadelphia? When was it—two or three years ago?"

"Certainly I do, Mr. Ringsmith."

"Can you say, off-hand what we made on that deal?"

"No," replied MacTavish cautiously, "but I do remember what we gave for it, and what we sold it for. There were a lot of expenses on that deal." There was a cunning look in MacTavish's eyes as he added the last words.

BUSINESS IS BUSINESS.

"Um, yes—what were the figures?"

"We gave £4,000, but it included those ormolu vases which Joyce sold for us at Christie's. You remember we were wrong about those, and it took some of the gilt off."

Ringsmith's heavy eyebrows met in a scowl.

"Well?" he said irritably.

"Whelan gave £7,500. He's a hard nut, you know."

"That'll do now, MacTavish. I want you to go and call at this place, have a look at the pictures, and report."

Mr. MacTavish lost no time in calling at Mrs. Stillwell's house. She was out, but had left a note for the gentleman from Mr. Ringsmith's, asking him to look at the pictures, and expressing her regret that she could not show them to him

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

herself. She was quite unable, she said, to decide upon a price, which she left entirely to Mr. Ringsmith.

A few days later Mrs. Stillwell was writing to her boy at the Front when Mr. MacTavish was announced. She is a slight, refined, gentle-looking little lady, and rose from her chair with some embarrassment. She had never had anything to do with gentlemen like Mr. MacTavish before, and hardly knew whether she ought to shake hands with him or not; but she did so with a gracious and slightly deprecating air. She felt she was under an obligation to him for giving him so much trouble, and she disliked very much being compelled to talk to him about selling her pictures.

"Won't you have a cup of tea, Mr. MacTavish?" she asked, not knowing exactly what to say.

BUSINESS IS BUSINESS

The tall Scotsman declined politely, and came straight to business.

"I've talked the matter over with Mr. Ringsmith, Mrs. Stillwell, and if you're agreeable I am prepared to buy the three pictures for the firm."

Mrs. Stillwell half - rose from her chair.

"Oh, thank you very much, thank you very much!" she said hastily.

"Purely a matter of business, madam. You may not be aware that in these times buying pictures is a somewhat dangerous operation."

"Oh, indeed! I didn't know."

Mrs. Stillwell blanched at the word "dangerous."

"I mean, we may be compelled to keep them for a considerable time. It's not easy to find purchasers."

"No, I suppose not, Mr. MacTavish."

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

"You are still unable to fix a price, Mrs. Stillwell?"

"I really—I—no, I don't think so. I have no idea what the value of the pictures is."

"Pictures have no value, madam; they are worth just what they can be sold for, neither more nor less."

"Oh, indeed! Yes."

"Mr. Ringsmith has decided to give you what I think may be considered in the circumstances a very handsome price for the three pictures. He has told me that I may offer you £5,000."

"Oh, I'm sure that's very kind indeed of Mr. Ringsmith." Mrs. Stillwell was quite astonished; she had not expected nearly so much.

MacTavish lost no time; he handed her a cheque, and in a few moments took his departure.

BUSINESS IS BUSINESS

Some weeks passed. Ringsmith again occupied the deep leather chair, and Peter Knott was announced.

"Good afternoon, Stephen; thought I'd look in for a moment. No, thanks." This in answer to Ringsmith's offer of tea.

"Mrs. Stillwell told me about the deal, Stephen."

"Well, were you satisfied?"

Peter Knott didn't answer the question.

"By the way," he remarked softly, "her boy's just come back. Got shot through one of his lungs. Extraordinary thing—miracle almost. He's made a marvelous recovery, thanks entirely to a motor ambulance being handy. They got him to the base hospital, and now he's almost convalescent. Aren't you glad you subscribed, Stephen?"

"Of course I'm glad. I don't give money unless I want to."

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

"You are very good about it, Stephen—very. I was wondering whether"—Peter Knott looked up at Ringsmith—"you'd feel like giving me another little cheque. You know these ambulances break down dreadfully fast. Fresh ones are always wanted, and with the new campaign——"

"Really, Peter, you try me pretty high. It's give, give, give. You seem to think that I've got a bottomless pocket."

"Not exactly bottomless, Stephen."

"But I say you do. I can't go on like this. Every day there's some new demand. Look at this." He took a type-written letter from the table and handed it to his friend. Peter Knott stuck his eyeglass into his eye and slowly read the letter.

"I say, Stephen, this must be the wrong letter. It's from those wheelworks of

BUSINESS IS BUSINESS

yours, telling you they've got so many orders they can't execute them, and that there's a new contract from the Government. They want to extend the works."

"Well, damn it! doesn't that mean more money, and the Government takes pretty nearly all the profit. You seem to forget that money's wanted in business. I shall have to shut up shop if this goes on. D'you think giving employment to hundreds of workmen isn't worth something, too? I'm thinking very seriously of closing Crossways Hall altogether; in fact, I should, only that it would cost me almost as much as keeping it open. There's no man in the country who has done more in the public interest than I have, but there's a limit to everything."

Ringsmith scowled at Peter, who made no attempt at replying.

"By the way, Ringsmith, did you know

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

Whelan is over here? I met him quite by chance yesterday. Seems he's come over on a large Government contract for shells. He asked after you. Told me about a Corot you sold him some years ago. He seemed to think he'd paid a big price."

"Well, he didn't." The tone of Ringsmith's reply was irritable. Peter Knott stopped putting on his gloves and looked at Ringsmith inquiringly.

"Not a big price? He told me £7,500."

"Oh, he told you that, did he? Have you any idea what kind of expenses there are in a transaction of that kind?"

"Not the slightest, Stephen."

"You don't seem to realize that there are not many people who have the antipathy to being mixed up in art deals that you have."

"Ah!" Peter Knott moved to the door.

BUSINESS IS BUSINESS

“Good-bye, Stephen,” he murmured, and closed it gently behind him.

By the first post in the morning Peter Knott received the following letter—

DEAR PETER,

Thinking it over after you left, I have decided to send you the enclosed for the motor ambulance fund. I never like refusing you, but I should like you to remember that business is one thing and charity another.

Yours ever,

STEPHEN RINGSMITH.

Within the letter was a cheque for £2,500.

“Not so bad,” muttered Peter, “but he’s got the Mauve and the Daubigny for nothing, and there were no expenses on this deal.”

“ BOBBY ”



V

“BOBBY”

WHEN War came, Julian Froelich, known to his friends as “Bobby,” found himself in a situation which in his wildest dreams he had never contemplated. This is not surprising, considering that his mental activities had been exclusively limited to procuring himself what he called “a good time.” In that brief phrase could be summed up Bobby’s entire philosophy, and when he suddenly had to face a state of things which from one moment to another swept away the groundwork upon which his life reposed, it is no wonder that he felt himself “knocked out.” With

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

incredible velocity his friends were caught up and whirled in every direction like cockle-shells in a hurricane. Their haunts knew them no more, and before he could realize his personal concern with catastrophic events Bobby became a disconsolate wanderer in search of the flotsam and jetsam which were all that remained of his demolished world.

For a time Bobby was unnerved. At first singly, then by twos, by threes, by dozens, those with whom his life had been spent—frequenters of the restaurant, the racecourse, the tavern, and the theatre—followed one another in a headlong race to the unknown. His brain reeled under successive shocks. He was awestruck by the appalling suddenness of death and destruction. Daring no inquiry, avoiding those whose faces he dreaded to read, he forsook his former luxurious resorts

“ BOBBY ”

and almost slunk into the corners of obscure eating-places and cafés in Soho.

Bobby will not easily forget those first few weeks of the War.

Then gradually he pulled himself together, and unable to escape the influence by which he was surrounded, he tried to take his little part in the common effort. But his training was against him. At forty-five years of age it is no easy task for any man to put the past behind him and begin afresh ; for Bobby to have done so would have needed a strength of will and character which he never at any time in his life possessed. He did succeed in getting various jobs, but one after another he threw them up. In each case he found a suitable excuse for himself and an explanation for his friends ; there was always some insuperable reason why he was “ obliged to chuck it,” and he finally

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

resigned himself to a form of existence which differed from his former one, but only in degree.

In the early months of the War, before restrictions were placed upon ordinary travellers, Bobby began going to Paris again, for although he felt if possible even more there than in London the changes brought about by the War, the old habit was too strong to resist; the journey itself provided a reaction against the depression which overshadowed him.

Some time after von Kluck had been hurled back from the gates of Paris—it must have been shortly after the return of the French Government from Bordeaux—Bobby found himself arriving at the Gare du Nord. He had engaged his apartment, as usual, at the Hôtel Ritz, and was about to step into the car which even in such times as these was sent to meet him,

“ BOBBY ”

when a lady approached and asked him if he would mind taking her to her destination, as there was neither cab nor car to be found at the station. Bobby's experienced eye took in the stranger at a glance ; she was unquestionably attractive, and with something of the old spirit he placed himself and his car at her disposal. It so happened that there was no inconvenience attached to the favour, which the lady acknowledged with becoming grace, for her destination was the same as his, and by the time Bobby had deposited her and her maid at the hotel they had struck up a quite promising acquaintance.

Several days passed, and Bobby's chance meeting ripened into an engrossing adventure.

Many officers in those early days were continually passing through Paris on their way to the Front or arriving there on short leave. There were all sorts of other

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

visitors—officials and bearers of dispatches, diplomatists and cosmopolitan adventurers out for gain, not to speak of their wives, sisters, and other female attachments. Some of these Bobby knew, others he met, and not a few of them were well enough pleased to accept his society, if only to profit by his ciceronage as evening advanced. But on this occasion Bobby had no eyes for chance encounters. His time was fully occupied, and he had come to the conclusion that his new acquaintance was the most tempting and fascinating creature Fate had ever cast across his path. He had, in fact, constituted himself her permanent escort.

Her chief occupation seemed to consist in visiting people who lived in various parts of Paris, where Bobby invariably accompanied her in the car he had engaged chiefly for her benefit, and he observed

“ BOBBY ”

that she had a considerable acquaintance among people whom she came across at the hotel or in the various restaurants and theatres they frequented. But she never seemed to do more than bow to them, and though it was evident that her appearance aroused flattering notice, she discouraged attentions and was smilingly evasive when approached. Nevertheless, she was full of engagements. One day she would have an appointment at eleven in the morning near the Arc de Triomphe, in the afternoon in the Boulevard Malesherbes ; the next day it would be near the Odéon in the morning and at a turning out of the Place Pigalle in the afternoon. On such occasions she would sweetly ask him to drop her at a certain place and to fetch her at a certain time ; then she would disappear and Bobby would be left to spend the interval kicking his heels.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

She dressed modestly in a taste that was quiet and restrained. Without being beautiful, her features were clear-cut, almost strong, and there was a radiancy about her smile and a gaiety in her brown eyes that Bobby found perfectly entrancing. She was no longer quite young; she might have been thirty; indeed, her hair, which was dark brown, was ever so slightly touched with silver, but this seemed to add to her attractiveness, which resided perhaps more in her complete naturalness than in any other quality. Bobby noticed that, unlike nearly all the women he knew, she used no colour on her lips, and only lightly dusted her face with powder, but her cheeks seemed always to have a bloom upon them as on grapes from a hothouse.

He found her a most delightful companion, always ready to talk about the

“BOBBY”

things that interested him most and to go anywhere he liked, provided that it did not clash with any of her private engagements.

But never in his experience had Bobby been so puzzled. He simply could not make out who or what she really was. This mystery, if anything, deepened her attraction for him. Her name was Madame de Corantin, and in answer to his inquiry she told him her Christian name was Francine, but he had not so far dared to call her by it. She had an extraordinary power of quietly checking any attempt on his part to make tender advances. He could not himself have explained how it was done, but she contrived to make him feel that any suggestion of familiarity would put an end to their intercourse, and for nothing in the world would he have risked it. Indeed, in his loose-ended-

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

ness, he looked upon the whole adventure as a special dispensation of Providence in his favour. Madame de Corantin was to him like a beacon to a lonely wayfarer who has lost his way in the night. To act as her escort and protector was, quite apart from the deeper feeling she inspired, a new object in life for him. Ever since their first meeting his depression had left him ; his existence had once more regained its savour.

She had frequently asked him to post letters for her, and sometimes to call at the hotel for them ; her correspondence seemed to be large, and the envelopes bore the stamps of various countries, chiefly Russia. She spoke English and French equally well, with a slight foreign accent, which she explained by saying that she was Russian by birth, but had married a French diplomatist, who died in Brazil ;

“ BOBBY ”

she said, too, that she had travelled a great deal, and had spent much of her time in South America, where she had been in the habit of speaking Spanish. Perhaps, had Bobby's companion been less attractive, he might have been more interested in these matters, but he was absorbed by her personality and troubled little about anything else.

Ever bright, vivacious, and in good spirits, she awakened Bobby to a new interest in life. The philosophy with which she regarded tumultuous events, the easy cynicism with which she dismissed a discussion which bordered upon the serious, seemed to deprive him of any means of enlightening himself as to her real sympathies.

Several times he had suggested that some friend should join them at dinner or at the theatre, but she opposed it with a velvety firmness. “ We are so well like

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

this," she would say. "Why should we spoil it?" And Bobby was delighted beyond measure.

The days passed. Bobby's original intention had been to remain in Paris only a week, but he was fully determined to stop on as long as Madame de Corantin accepted his companionship. If he stayed there until the end of the War, he did not care, provided he could be with her.

About this time Bobby, waiting one evening in the hall of the hotel for Madame de Corantin to come down to dinner, observed a familiar figure in Staff uniform. It was Alistair Ramsey. They exchanged salutations, but Ramsey's manner was marked by a hauteur which even Bobby, good-natured as he was, could not fail to notice. At that moment Madame de Corantin stepped out of the lift, and

“ BOBBY ”

with a “ See you later,” to which the other responded by a curt nod, Bobby went to meet her. As she greeted him she stood still an instant, apparently looking at some one behind him, and Bobby turned sharply to follow her eyes. They were fixed on Alistair Ramsey, who was staring back at her with a look of astonishment.

The restaurant was fuller than usual, but their table was always reserved, and Bobby (who prides himself on his taste in such matters) looked forward to the little compliment he regularly received for the appropriateness of his menu. But on this occasion Madame de Corantin seemed to be oblivious of menu and of Bobby alike. She sat apparently lost in thought, and, eating mechanically what was placed before her, replied with monosyllables to Bobby's attempts at conversation. Then,

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

of a sudden, her face cleared like the sky on an April day.

“Pardon me, my friend, I fear I have been very ill-mannered. I have received an annoying letter, and was thinking about it.”

Bobby was full of concern. “Is there anything I can do?” he asked.

She looked at him with a half-smile. “Who knows? Perhaps!”

“Do tell me. You know I long to be of use to you, and there is so little that I can do.”

“But who could do more? No lonely woman could ask for a more devoted cavalier.” Her appreciative glance was nectar to Bobby. So susceptible was he to the expression of her eyes, he would have been powerless to resist anything they asked of him. But he had never been put to the test; on the contrary,

“ BOBBY ”

she had accepted with demur even the comparatively trifling services he had been able to render her. She was most punctilious in regard to any expense to which he was put, and insisted, to his discomfiture, on paying her share of everything. At first they had little quarrels about it, but Bobby had been compelled to give way to her firm but gracious insistence.

“ Tell me, my friend ”—her eyes played full upon him as she spoke—“ who was that gentleman you were talking to just before dinner ? ”

For a moment Bobby hesitated. If there were one man in all his acquaintance whom he would have preferred that Madame de Corantin should not know, it was Alistair Ramsey. Bobby had known him for a good many years. The acquaintance dated back to a period when Ramsey was a

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

comparatively young man of fashionable manner and appearance on half-commission with a firm of stockbrokers. Even then he aspired to smart society, but this social recognition involved an expenditure considerably beyond his earning capacity. In those days Bobby had been of no small use to him. Many were the dinners to which Ramsey had done the inviting, he the paying, and if that gentleman of fashion was not above accepting the lavish attentions of the man about town, whom he regarded as quite outside his own world, still less was he averse to the loans forthcoming at moments of embarrassment, accompanied by a thinly veiled hint from Bobby that they were repayable only when circumstances permitted.

Bobby was not calculating, but without any deep reflection on the subject he

“ BOBBY ”

knew that Ramsey was “on the make,” and it was not unreasonable to expect him to have at least a kindly feeling for an old friend when he “arrived.” In this, however, he was disappointed. Though with the rise in his fortunes Ramsey’s vanity extinguished his sense of obligation, his pride was not equal to paying his debts. Bobby may or may not have realized that his former friend’s gratitude was of the same quality as his honour, but in any case he showed no resentment. He was sufficiently accustomed to the ways of the successful to take them as they were, and to pass over those characteristics to which, after all, they partly owe their success. Indeed, had it been a question of introducing any one but Madame de Corantin to Ramsey, he would have ignored the latter’s insolence and ingratitude alike and conformed to his habitual rôle as

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

purveyor of amusement to all and sundry. For Bobby's dignity was not great, and the secret of the kind of popularity he enjoyed was in no small measure attributable to his own lack of self-respect. But for the first time in his life Bobby's pride now asserted itself. At last he was being "tried too high."

"Excuse me, madame, if before answering you I ask you why you are interested?"

Madame de Corantin considered an instant. "I shall tell you, my friend, but not now." She glanced round her significantly as she spoke. "The little story is rather private, and I should not care to be overheard. You understand?"

"Oh, please don't—please," he stammered, feeling he had been indiscreet, but flattered all the same by the promise of her confidence. "His name is Alistair Ramsey. I have known him a long time."

“ BOBBY ”

“ Is he an intimate friend of yours, monsieur? ”

“ Well, no, I can't say intimate, but I used to know him very well.”

“ What is his position in London? ”

Bobby thought a moment. “ Do you mean his position now during the War or generally? ”

“ Both.”

“ Well, shortly before the War he had been made a partner in an important firm in the Stock Exchange. He is supposed to come of a good family, and he went about a great deal. One of those sort of men ladies like—asked out a lot, that sort of thing—good-looking, too, don't you think? ”

The question was inspired by jealousy. The more Bobby thought about Ramsey the less he liked the prospect of introducing him to Madame de Corantin.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

"I quite believe he is considered so," she replied evasively. "But you were saying——"

"Well, it's generally believed, I dare say it isn't true, that he was made a member of that firm through being—ahem—a great friend of the wife of the chief partner. I don't like suggesting that sort of thing, you know, but as you asked me——"

"Oh please go on," Madame de Corantin said, holding her chin with both hands and leaning her elbows on the table. Her eyes were looking closely into Bobby's, and he moved uneasily under their sustained gaze.

"Just after the War began—— Oh, I forgot to mention something: he is a very great friend of Mrs. Norman Lockyard, the wife of the Cabinet Minister. I seem to keep on bringing in ladies, but somehow when

“BOBBY”

one talks about Alistair Ramsey one can't help it. Through Mrs. Lockyard, he got introduced to Sir Archibald Fellowes. It wasn't very difficult, you know; Ramsey gives little parties in his flat in Mount Street—all sorts of people go. It's extraordinary when one thinks of it—I mean to me who know what his life has been—but he's considered amusing. I know one evening, a week or two ago, Lord Coleton was there, and——”

Madame de Corantin was listening attentively. “Did you say Lord Coleton?” she asked. “Those English names are so puzzling.”

“Yes,” said Bobby. “Why, do you know him?”

“Oh, slightly,” she answered, “but continue your story, it is so interesting.”

“Where was I? Oh, yes, let me see. Have you ever heard of Léonie Blas?”

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

Madame de Corantin smiled at the sudden question. "Oh yes, the chanteuse. What has she to do with it?"

"Well, you see, Ramsey and Léonie were more or less *collés*, and Ramsey introduced old Fellowes to her. Soon afterwards Ramsey became Fellowes' private secretary."

"Ah!" The exclamation came through Madame de Corantin's closed lips almost like a sigh. "And Sir Archibald is a very important personage, I believe?"

"Important! They say he runs the whole War Office."

Madame de Corantin laughed. The sound of it rippled away joyously. It was infectious, and Bobby laughed too.

"Anything more I can tell you?"

"Oh no, thanks. Now let us talk about other things, but I must know this wonderful Mr. Ramsey. You will intro-

“ BOBBY ”

duce him to me, won't you? Ah!” The reason for the exclamation was evident.

Their table faced the entrance, and Madame de Corantin's seat enabled her to see every one who entered or left the restaurant. Alistair Ramsey was standing in the doorway, waiting for the head waiter to show him to his table. His eyes were fixed upon Madame de Corantin's face. The look of astonishment Bobby had noticed before had given place to one of mingled surprise and curiosity. He had exchanged his uniform for evening dress, and wore a flower in his button-hole. A waiter went towards him, and he began threading his way through the diners. Another instant, and he stood beside Madame de Corantin's chair.

Under the compulsion of a will felt but not expressed in words, Bobby rose as he approached, and introduced him.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

"I hope you will allow me to join you after dinner?" Alistair Ramsey asked as he bowed.

Madame de Corantin smiled affirmatively, and Bobby ground his teeth as Ramsey proceeded to his table.

Madame de Corantin did not care for the chatter and casual encounters of the public rooms of an hotel. • It was her practice to retire to her own salon after dinner, unless she were going to a theatre. After the first two or three days of their acquaintance she had invited Bobby to join her there, and he had been immensely flattered. He looked forward to that moment every evening, for it seemed to him to admit a certain intimacy which he greatly valued. But now his heart was beating with apprehension. Would she ask Ramsey to her private apartment?

“BOBBY”

“May I tell the waiter to bring coffee upstairs?” he asked in a low tone.

“By all means,” she said, “but you might order for three and leave word for Mr. Ramsey to join us when he has finished his dinner.” Her tone was careless, and Bobby’s heart turned to stone.

“Perhaps I had better tell him myself?” He tried to conceal his chagrin, but his voice betrayed him.

Madame de Corantin turned to him gaily. “Oh, I expect he’ll find his way without that,” she answered, “and I want to tell you something before he comes.”

“Come and sit here by me,” she said, as they entered her apartment. “You have been very discreet; I have noticed it from the beginning. Had it not been for that I could not have allowed you to be with me so much. Discretion is a great gift, Mr. Froelich.”

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

“ Oh, please don't call me ‘ Mr. Froelich ’ ; couldn't you manage to say ‘ Bobby ’ at least once before Ramsey appears ? ”

Madame de Corantin broke into that catching laugh of hers. “ Very well then, ‘ Bobby,’ my friend, I am going to trust to your discretion by telling you my little story. I was once travelling on a ship going to America—at that time I was very unhappy. I was quite alone. My husband had recently died. I have been very lucky in my life—you are an example.”

“ I ? ” exclaimed Bobby.

“ Yes, you. Did you not arrive on the scene just when I wanted you, at the Gare du Nord ? ”

“ Oh yes, I see what you mean. Of course, of course ; thanks awfully for saying that.”

“ Well, just as you arrived then, so some one else arrived once long ago, and I

“ BOBBY ”

was grateful to him, as indeed I am grateful to you.”

Bobby was trying to find something to say, but Madame de Corantin continued—

“I was glad of protection going to America. It is not pleasant for a woman to have to travel alone. I daresay some people would have misunderstood the position. My companion on that voyage was well known. He was a Prince of a distinguished German family. He was nothing to me. I need hardly tell you that.”

The suggestion in her last remark was not very flattering to Bobby, but he was too much interested to notice it.

“On that same ship was travelling your friend, Mr. Ramsey. He knew the Prince slightly, I do not know how.”

“Oh, he always manages to get to know people somehow or other. That's one of Ramsey's special gifts,” Bobby

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

remarked with as near an approach to bitterness as he was capable of expressing.

“He used to come up and speak to the Prince when we were reclining on our deck chairs, but my companion did not encourage him. I think, Bobby, he was like you—a little jealous. Anyhow, towards the end of the voyage I received a note. It was handed to me by a stewardess. It was from Mr. Ramsey, and I handed it to the Prince. I do not exactly know what happened, for I did not see Mr. Ramsey again, but from what the Prince told me, he must have said something very disagreeable to Mr. Ramsey. That is all the story.”

She had hardly said the words when there was a knock on the door, and Alistair Ramsey entered the room and stood before her, bowing. With a few easy words the new-comer settled himself

“ BOBBY ”

in a chair, and at the invitation of Madame de Corantin lit a cigarette. Nothing in his attitude or in hers suggested that they had ever seen each other before, still less that an embarrassing episode figured in the background of their earlier acquaintance.

Madame de Corantin led the conversation by a few casual remarks, which were immediately taken up by Ramsey, and in a few minutes they were talking together as people do who, though they have not met before, have known of each other for years. Ramsey brought in the names of common acquaintances, of places they both knew, with an easy assumption of mutual understanding that what he had to say about them would interest her.

As a rule his attitude in the presence of ladies was that of a man accustomed to the recognition of his ascendancy.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

Perhaps this was one of the reasons of the quite peculiar hostility with which most men regarded him, but with Madame de Corantin his manner was deferential, and it was clear that he was doing everything in his power to ingratiate himself.

Bobby took little part in the conversation, and Ramsey's demeanour towards him was not such as to encourage him to do so. Ramsey had the assurance which comes from social success, and he took no trouble to conceal the indifference, if not contempt, with which he regarded the other man. His manner was alternately insolent and condescending; he kept his eyes fixed upon Madame de Corantin, ignoring Bobby's presence completely.

Glib of speech, Ramsey had a certain gift of humour, which displayed itself in flippant witticisms generally at the ex-

“ BOBBY ”

pense of others. He undoubtedly possessed the art of provoking laughter, but there was always malice behind his frivolity. In appearance he was elegant without being engaging, and one felt the spitefulness of the dark eyes beneath the abundant hair, and the hardness of his mouth showed itself even when he laughed. An onlooker could not have failed to contrast Madame de Corantin's two visitors, and an Englishman certainly would have done so to the disadvantage of Ramsey.

In spite of his German name Bobby was typically English in appearance, and no one would have supposed that of the two he was the more cosmopolitan. As he sat now listening to the conversation his good-natured face wore an expression of perplexity and discomfort. Bobby was suffering the pangs of jealousy, and at every fresh sally of the other he was

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

watching Madame de Corantin's face to see its effect. No wonder, he thought, that Ramsey had few friends, and yet he could not help envying the caustic readiness of his tongue and the skill with which he had so quickly turned the situation to his advantage.

For an hour they talked until, in some subtle and indefinable manner, Bobby felt that Madame de Corantin desired to be left alone. He had frequently had this experience with her; she seemed to be able to indicate a desire without expressing it, and he rose now from his seat and wished her good-night. Ramsey did not move, and Bobby's heart sank within him at the prospect of leaving his rival in possession, but, as he took Madame de Corantin's hand, she held it an instant in hers, turning at the same time towards Ramsey.

“BOBBY”

“I am so sorry,” she said to him, “that our agreeable little party must break up, but I have many letters to write this evening, and shall look forward to seeing you both to-morrow.”

Bobby was elated as he went out of the room, closely followed by Ramsey; indeed, reaction prompted geniality.

“I think I’ll go round to Maxim’s for an hour; it’s quite early. Will you join me? There are sure to be people you know there.”

They were standing in the hall of the hotel.

“Thanks, it’s very good of you, but I too have letters to write,” Ramsey replied, and turning coldly on his heel he left Bobby to go out alone.

Bobby strolled down the Place de la Concorde, but before he reached Maxim’s his heart misgave him; he was reviewing

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

the events of the evening and, though he could not justify it, his mind was full of suspicion. It was queer her wanting to see Ramsey again after the way he had behaved. What could have been her object? Was he really so irresistible? She had certainly shown quite plainly that she wanted to see him, and yet she had shown equally plainly that she didn't want him to remain with her alone. He wondered how long Ramsey would be staying in Paris, and what effect his presence would have on his intercourse with Madame de Corantin. Would he be able to see as much of her or would she drop him in favour of Ramsey. The thought tortured him, but it wormed its way more and more into his brain. Bobby had very little confidence in his powers of pleasing; it was a common experience of his to be thrown over in favour of men much

“BOBBY”

less attractive to women than Ramsey. It was true that hitherto he had not much cared, and when he had been given the “go-by” he had always reflected that there were as good fish in the sea, and so on; but that wasn’t the case now.

Thinking deeply, he had reached the entrance of Maxim’s without knowing it, but looking in, he turned away in disgust; he had no desire to face the crowd inside, he wanted to think things over. He walked on up the Boulevard de la Madeleine, and with every step his jealousy increased. The suspicion rankled; he felt certain that Ramsey would somehow or other manage to see her again before he could—why, he might even contrive to do so that very evening. He knew that Ramsey would dare anything where women were concerned. Very likely while

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

he was walking up the Boulevard, Ramsey was sitting in her room.

Finally, he could bear it no longer. Turning, he walked swiftly back to the hotel; it was a little past eleven, too early to go to bed, too late in a darkened and subdued Paris to do anything else. He wondered where Ramsey was, and, going to the porter, asked him casually if he had seen him.

No, he had not seen Monsieur Ramsey since he had gone upstairs half an hour ago; he supposed he had gone to bed.

Had Ramsey gone to bed? The more Bobby turned it over in his mind the stronger his suspicions grew, and then came a moment of desperation—he must know, he could not bear the suspense. His own room was two floors above that on which was Madame de Coranin's apartment. Declining the lift, he walked

“ BOBBY ”

slowly upstairs, and as though he were doing so by mistake, directed his steps softly past the door of her salon. No one was in the corridor, and noiselessly he approached the door. Was that a man's voice? Yes, there was not a doubt of it. He listened again, he looked up and down the passage, no one was in sight. He placed his head close to the woodwork of the door; with a sense of ignominy he realized that if there had been a keyhole he would have placed his ear to that—anything to know—anything. Yes, he recognized Ramsey's voice distinctly; he was there. On tiptoe he retraced his steps. Arrived at the entrance hall he flung himself into a chair, a prey to utter wretchedness.

Somehow the night passed.

Towards morning, perhaps at six or

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

seven, he fell into a heavy sleep, completely worn out by his mental sufferings. He awoke late, and, glancing at his watch, saw to his horror that it was already eleven o'clock. Cursing himself as he realized that this was the hour at which Madame de Corantin generally went out, he rang the bell. How he longed for his trusted valet, enlisted two months back. Now he had only a hotel servant to send on messages. When the man arrived he dispatched him instantly to find out whether Madame de Corantin had sent him any message, and began to dress hurriedly. The servant did not return, and in his impatience Bobby cursed him and rang again. Another servant appeared and was hurried off on the same errand. In this way twenty minutes passed; Bobby was dressed and flew downstairs. Unable to disguise his anxiety, he asked the porter if he had seen Madame de Corantin.

“BOBBY”

“Madame de Corantin left an hour ago, Monsieur.”

“Left? What do you mean?”

“Yes, Monsieur, she left—left with her luggage and her maid—everything.”

Controlling himself as best he could Bobby turned away in a state of complete dejection. He sought an out-of-the-way corner and sat down, trying to calm himself so that he could think.

“Gone away! Gone away!” He repeated the words mechanically. What did it all mean?

Somebody was approaching him; he looked up, a servant handed him a note. He tore it open breathlessly.

DEAR BOBBY, MY FRIEND,

News reached me early this morning which necessitated my immediate departure. I know, alas, that you will feel sad at not seeing me again. Believe me, so am I, but it is unavoidable. I asked for you before I left, but they told me at the hotel that

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

you had not yet left your room. I scribble this line at the station. Forgive me, my dear friend, for all the trouble I have given you, and believe that I am very grateful. We shall meet again some day, and meanwhile keep a kindly remembrance of your friend

FRANCINE DE CORANTIN.

She gave no address.

Bobby read the letter again and again ; he could hardly believe his eyes. The worst thing that could possibly happen had befallen him. Where could she have gone, and why couldn't she tell him, and oh, how could he have been such a fool as to have gone on sleeping like a stupid log at the moment that she was going away? He would never be able to forgive himself for that. Was there any connection between her departure and her meeting with Alistair Ramsey? Bobby tried to concentrate his mind on the problem, but it baffled him.

“ BOBBY ”

Completely bewildered, he cross-questioned the hall porter, but he could add nothing to what he had already said. Madame de Corantin had gone and she had left no address and he had not the slightest idea where, nor did he know to what station she had gone. A car had come for her, apparently a private one, she had not ordered it at the hotel. What trains were there leaving? Oh, there were numbers; there was one to Rouen and Havre and also to Dieppe about that time, to Bordeaux and San Sebastian, to all kinds of places. Bobby realized the utter hopelessness of attempting to trace her. Wretchedly the hours passed; in the middle of the afternoon he decided that whatever happened he would not stay another night in Paris. The thought of it sickened him. Paris, the hotel, and everything else had become hateful. No,

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

he would spend that night at Dieppe, and go to London the next day, that was all he could think of.

Back in London, Bobby's condition of misery, so far from improving, became worse. His life, aimless enough ever since the War, seemed now more aimless than ever. Every man he knew had something to do ; he alone was objectless and workless. More profoundly than ever he realized all that Madame de Corantin had meant to him. Her disappearance had made his life a blank. Had there been some glimmer of hope, however slight, of penetrating the mystery, had there been the faintest clue to her present whereabouts, he would have thrown himself heart and soul into the endeavour to trace her, but he had absolutely nothing to go upon.

 Weary and desolate, he haunted

“ BOBBY ”

restaurants and hotels, in the vague hope that chance might some day yield him a glimpse of her, as a gambler clings to a faint prospect of redeeming his fortunes through some wonderful and unexpected revulsion of luck. But the days passed without the slightest encouragement, and his misery turned almost to despair.

At last, at his wits' end to know what to do with himself, he besought a boon companion of his night life to come to his rescue. To this one war had brought opportunity. His name was Bertram Trent. He had lived all sorts of lives, had been married and divorced, and had made his appearance more than once in the Bankruptcy Court, but he had knocked about the world and seen service.

Offering himself at the beginning of the War, he had taken part in the Great Retreat and had been wounded. On his

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

recovery he had been given the command of a battalion, and at Bobby's earnest entreaty he promised him a commission, provided he could get it confirmed at the War Office. This saved Bobby. He lost no time in putting in his application, and, awaiting the Gazette, he occupied himself in ordering his kit and in getting himself into some sort of physical condition to undertake duties for which his previous life had ill-prepared him. Though considerably past the age for military service, he had not contemplated the possibility of being refused a commission.

Dropping in one day at the Carlton for lunch, he met Harold Clancey, who, to his surprise, was wearing the Staff cap. Clancey told him that he had been working for some time at the War Office, and had been given the rank of captain.

“BOBBY”

“Let’s have lunch together,” suggested Bobby.

Bobby had met Clancey at all sorts of places, but they had never been on intimate terms; in fact, the two men had little more than a nodding acquaintance. Bobby had run into him the last time at Homburg, and Clancey had given him to understand that he had some sort of vague diplomatic appointment. He had drifted across Bobby’s life afterwards in a shadowy way, seeming to have nothing special to do, but to know a great many people and to take life as a sort of a joke. He talked lightly and cynically about serious things, and used foreign expressions with great ease and fluency. It was characteristic of him that since the War he made frequent use of German idioms, and when conversation turned upon passing events he professed a com-

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

plete contempt for English ideas, habits, and methods, and a great admiration for those of the Germans.

"What's your job at the War Office?" asked Bobby.

"As I really don't know myself it is rather difficult to explain it to you," answered the other, "but it seems chiefly to consist in sitting tight and preventing other people from annexing it."

"I'm up for a commission," remarked Bobby. "Can you do anything to help me about it?"

"Dear me, what a silly thing to do! What regiment?"

Bobby explained.

"I shall be charmed to do what I can," replied Clancey, "but as they simply loathe me at Headquarters I don't think it will do you much good."

They fell to discussing other things.

“ BOBBY ”

Bobby, obsessed by his recent experiences, could not resist telling his companion something about them. But he did not mention Ramsey. The implied admission that he had been cut out was too humiliating. Clancey's interest was evidently aroused. He wanted to hear all about Madame de Corantin.

“She seems to have fascinated you,” he remarked.

“She'd fascinate anybody.”

“And you really don't know what has become of her? How extraordinary!”

“Isn't it?”

“You mean to say you cannot trace her in any way?”

“I have no more idea than the man in the moon where she is.”

Clancey reflected.

“Did you say she was French?” he asked.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

"Her husband was; she herself is Russian."

Clancey looked at him.

"Oh, Russian, is she? Corantin, Corantin. Let me see. I seem to remember the name somehow."

"No, do you?" Bobby's voice betrayed his interest.

"I must think about it," said Clancey. He pulled out his watch. "I think it is time I got back to the War Office. I'll see about the commission, Froelich, and let you know."

"This is where I live," said Bobby, handing him a card. "Do look me up. I do want that commission, and as quickly as possible."

They went out of the restaurant and separated in the street, Bobby taking his way towards his rooms in Down Street. He was wondering whether perhaps luck

“BOBBY”

had come his way, and whether Clancey would reveal to him some means of finding Madame de Corantin. If he did, damn the commission!

That evening, as on all others, Bobby was bored to death; the habits of twenty years were not to be thrown off in a day. It was impossible for him to go to bed before the small hours, and not knowing how else to kill time he dropped in at the Savoy restaurant. It was late when he got there, and he strolled through the foyer, stopping at various tables to talk to acquaintances. He had no intention of taking supper, but just wanted to see who was there.

Of a sudden, for no reason that he could possibly have explained, an impulse made him walk into the restaurant. In that instant he felt positively, he could have sworn that Madame de Corantin

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

was there. His heart beat so that he thought it must be heard as he made his way to the entrance, and immediately, with a strange sort of intuition, his eyes found her.

There she was, at the table on the right. He could see her through the glass screen, and Ramsey was with her. He stood still a moment, devouring her with his eyes, and then she looked up and recognized him. Was she really beckoning to him? The reaction was so great that he dared not believe the evidence of his senses. No, there was no doubt; she was actually beckoning. As he walked towards the table he felt as though his legs would give way under him; and now he was by her; he held her hand.

"Ah, Bobby, my friend, I am so pleased to see you."

“BOBBY”

The familiar voice, the familiar glance! It was all too good to be true. He was blind to the presence of Ramsey. He was alone with her; Ramsey did not exist; the restaurant did not exist. The hum of voices, the clatter of plates, the movements of the waiters, were distant sounds: all he knew was that he was standing there by her.

“Sit down, Bobby.”

Mechanically he seated himself, and gradually some of his equanimity returned. He could speak, but he said nothing of what he felt. Instinctively he knew that it was wiser to make no reference to anything that had passed.

Ramsey's face was set and cold, but all his capacity for insolent indifference did not enable him to conceal his annoyance. His eyes flashed with anger.

“I think we ought to be going; it

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

is getting rather late. We don't want to be swept out with the dust, do we?" He addressed Madame de Corantin.

"Oh, I am in no hurry, Mr. Ramsey," she replied. "It gives me great pleasure to see Mr. Froelich again. I was obliged to leave Paris so suddenly, and never had an opportunity of showing him how much I appreciated his kindness to me."

Ramsey said nothing, but he glared at Bobby vindictively.

Presently Madame de Corantin rose, but as she left the room she made a point of keeping Bobby beside her, and in her inimitable way she asked Ramsey to fetch her cloak. For a moment Bobby had the exquisite joy of being alone with her.

"Only tell me one thing," he almost gasped. "Tell me that I may see you, and when."

“BOBBY”

She thought a moment. “Not to-morrow, I fear. I should like to so much, but I have not a moment. Come the next day to lunch. I am staying at Claridge’s.”

Ramsey appeared with the cloak, and she was gone.

What the next hours meant to Bobby can be imagined. They were passing somehow. The night, the morning, the afternoon wore away. He bought some magnificent roses and returned to his flat to dress, determined that he would take them himself to Claridge’s, hoping that by some chance he might catch a glimpse of her.

He was just starting out when, to his surprise, Clancey was announced.

“There is something I wanted to tell you, Froelich.”

Bobby waited impatiently.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

"That lady you were talking about, Madame de Corantin. I think I remember something."

Bobby was nervously anxious to get away. What Clancey had to tell him mattered little now.

"Oh, thanks very much, Clancey. The fact is, I've seen her."

Clancey's nonchalant manner changed instantaneously.

"Really!" he exclaimed.

"At the Savoy last night. She is here in London. She is staying at Claridge's. In fact, to tell you the truth, I am taking these flowers there now. I am to lunch with her to-morrow. It has been a great surprise. I never dreamt of such a thing," Bobby stammered on excitedly.

Clancey became calm again.

"Oh, that's most interesting," he said.
"You will lunch with her to-morrow!"

“BOBBY”

I say, Froelich, you might introduce me. I could turn up after lunch, you know.”

Bobby's face got serious.

“Well, I tell you, Clancey, old chap, as a rule I am quite ready to introduce my friends to any lady I know, but in this particular case it is not quite the same. You see, the fact is—the last time I introduced a friend of mine the result was—well, it was not exactly what I bargained for.”

“What do you mean?” asked Clancey.

“What I mean is that I introduced Alistair Ramsey to her in Paris, with the result that I have never seen her since until yesterday.”

Clancey did not immediately reply, but a curious expression overspread his face. “Alistair Ramsey,” he murmured, and then again, “Alistair Ramsey, dear me!”

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

Bobby looked at him wonderingly. Clancey laughed lightly.

"That reminds me," he said. "I inquired about your commission at the War Office. You know, I suppose, that Alistair Ramsey is private secretary to Sir Archibald Fellowes. Old Fellowes decides upon all commissions, and your charming friend, Mr. Ramsey, informed him you were not a fit person to wear his Majesty's uniform."

Bobby stared.

"The dirty dog!" he exclaimed. "Well, I'm damned! That at the last, after everything!"

"Yes, just that," remarked Clancey. "So you introduced him to Madame de Corantin?"

"Not because I wanted to," replied Bobby.

"And she has been with him ever since?"

"Oh, I don't know that."

“BOBBY”

“But she was with him last night at the Savoy?”

“Yes. Damn him! I must be off now. Clancey, really, I’m awfully obliged to you.”

“Well, may I come to Claridge’s to-morrow? I promise I won’t cut you out—I only want to make her acquaintance. She must be such a charming woman.”

“All right. Look in after lunch,” Bobby answered, and, seizing the huge parcel which contained his flowers, he led the way out of the room and thence out of the flat to the cab which was waiting for him.

Had Bobby looked out of the window of that cab he would have been surprised. Clancey was running down the street towards Piccadilly as fast as his legs could carry him.

Another shock was in store for poor Bobby. Jumping out of his taxi, he pre-

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

sented himself to the hall-porter, armed with his huge paper parcel from the florist.

"For Madame de Corantin," he said.

The porter looked at him; he knew him well and accepted the offering hesitatingly.

"For Madame de Corantin, you said, sir?"

"Yes," said Bobby.

"Madame de Corantin left early this afternoon, Mr. Froelich."

For a moment Bobby was speechless.

"Left?" he gasped. "Are you sure?"

"I'm perfectly certain, sir."

"But surely she is coming back again, isn't she? Why, I'm lunching with her to-morrow."

The porter looked at him in surprise.

"Take a seat for a moment, sir, and I'll go and inquire, though to the best of my belief she took all her luggage with her."

“BOBBY”

In a moment the man came back.

“Yes, sir, she and her maid and all her luggage left about two o’clock. There were two cars; one was brought by a gentleman.”

Bobby pulled himself together.

“Ah! Mr. Alistair Ramsey, I suppose?” He tried to put indifference into his voice.

“Yes, sir, I think it was Mr. Alistair Ramsey.”

Bobby walked out of the hotel. “Oh, damn him, damn him, damn him!” he muttered as he threw himself into a cab.

“Go to Down Street.”

Arrived at his rooms, Bobby cast his poor flowers into a corner, and, flinging himself on to a sofa, buried his face in his hands. What was the meaning of it, and how could she be so cruel as to play the same trick on him again? What was the object of telling him to come

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

and see her? It would have been by far kinder to ignore him when she saw him at the Savoy. And yet even now Bobby was not resentful. He was bewildered, but far more was he humiliated at the thought of Ramsey's triumph. There must surely be some explanation. She had greeted him so kindly; she had shown such evident pleasure at seeing him again. Why should she have acted that part? There was no object in it. Something must have happened, something quite outside the range of ordinary events. As he had done a hundred times, Bobby returned on the past and tried to piece together consecutively all the incidents since his first meeting with Madame de Corantin. Gradually an impression formed itself in his mind that what at first had seemed an attractive mystery was something deeper than he had imagined. Gradually there

“BOBBY”

spread over him a vague sensation of discomfort, of apprehension even. Still, when he thought about her it seemed impossible to connect anything sinister with a personality so charming, with a disposition so amiable. No, it was beyond him; it was useless his attempting to puzzle out the problem. Only time could explain it. As they had met at the Savoy, so sooner or later they would meet again. He knew it was useless to try and forget her; that was impossible, but, in the meantime, what?

Suddenly his reflections were interrupted. Some one was ringing the bell at the entrance. Bobby went to the door. Two men were standing outside—strangers to him.

“Are you Mr. Froelich?” one of them asked.

“Yes,” answered Bobby. “Why? What do you want?”

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

"I should like to speak to you a moment."

"What about?" Bobby eyed them suspiciously.

"I am from Scotland Yard, Mr. Froelich. We'd better go inside to talk."

Bobby, quite bewildered, led them into his sitting-room, and shut the door.

"My name is Inspector Groombridge," said the spokesman of the two. "I have been instructed to place you under arrest."

"Me! Under arrest? What on earth have I done? There must be some mistake."

Bobby was horrified.

"Those are my instructions, Mr. Froelich, and I am afraid I must ask you to come with me. My colleague, Sub-inspector Dane, is to remain here in possession, and I am afraid I must ask you to hand him your keys."

"My keys?" Bobby felt in his pockets. "What sort of keys do you mean?" He

“BOBBY”

pulled a gold chain out of his pocket to which were attached his latchkey and a few others. He held them in his hand, and ticked them off one by one mechanically.

“This is the key of the cupboard where I keep my cigars and liqueurs; this is the key of my dispatch-box. I don’t think I’ve got anything else locked up.”

“Have you no safe, no desk or other receptacle where you keep your papers, Mr. Froelich—documents of any kind?”

“Papers—documents?” ejaculated Bobby.
“No, I haven’t got any documents or papers. What do you mean?”

“Well, I’m afraid it will be the duty of Sub-inspector Dane to search your apartment, Mr. Froelich, and I want to save you from having anything broken open if it can be avoided.”

“There is nothing to break open. I don’t lock anything up except cigars and

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

things of that kind, and as to my dispatch-box, there's not much there either. I hardly know what there is—I haven't looked inside it for ever so long. There may be a few private letters."

"What sort of letters?" asked the inspector.

To Bobby this sounded menacing.

"Oh, I don't know; perhaps there may be one or two—well, what shall I call them?—love letters, I suppose. Anyhow, here are the keys." He handed them over to the other man as he spoke.

"Call a cab." The inspector spoke to his subordinate.

"I say," asked Bobby apprehensively, "am I going to be locked up?"

The inspector hesitated slightly. Bobby's innocence seemed to strike him. He was not the sort of person he was used to arresting.

“BOBBY.”

“I am afraid it's more than likely, Mr. Froelich.”

“Can't I change my clothes?” queried Bobby. “You see, I've got on evening dress, and I suppose I shan't have a chance of getting out of it.”

The inspector reflected a moment.

“Oh yes, Mr. Froelich. I don't see why you should not change, but I'm afraid I must ask you to let me accompany you.”

“Well, I'm—— D'you think I'm going to try and escape?”

“Oh, I don't say that, Mr. Froelich, but sometimes things happen on these occasions, and it's my duty to be on the safe side. I'm sorry to inconvenience you.”

“Come on in, then.” Bobby led the way into his dressing-room, and in a few minutes he was rolling off with his strange companion to some destination unknown.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

After the most uncomfortable night Bobby had ever spent in his life he was escorted next morning by Sub-inspector Dane to Scotland Yard. He was ushered into a waiting-room, and there he sat with the inspector, waiting until he should be summoned before the Assistant Commissioner. Had he been able to see what was going on in the adjoining room, he would have been exceedingly surprised.

The Assistant Commissioner, one of those public servants whose quiet, unobtrusive manner covers a strong character and a great efficiency, was sitting at his table talking to Harold Clancey. They were in earnest consultation.

"Then I understand, Captain Clancey," said the Assistant Commissioner, "that this lady has got clear off?"

Clancey smiled serenely.

"Oh, rather! Address: Hôtel des Indes,

“BOBBY”

The Hague—quite a comfortable place and quite an important German espionage centre.”

“I gather that our man was too late.”

“By some hours, I should say,” Clancey replied. “You see, we only got the report in from France quite late. I sent your man to watch her while I went to see Froelich. I was sure he was all right, but I wanted to satisfy myself. By the time I reached our place I found the chief in the deuce of a stew. Your man had got back, and reported that she’d gone. They’d kicked up the devil’s delight at Headquarters, and the chief was out for blood. He was determined to arrest somebody, and I suggested Ramsey, but he got purple in the face and told me he’d instructed your people to bag Froelich. I thought this quite idiotic, but it relieved the chief’s feelings, and it was too late to

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

do anything sensible. We knew the ship she took; of course, she was much too clever to sail under the English flag. Naturally we wirelessly, but they won't dare touch her. After that last row it's hands off these Dutchmen."

"And the view of your department, Captain Clancey, is that it's useless for us to detain Mr. Froelich?"

"Absolutely useless. I can swear to it. As I told you, I don't know him well, but I know all about him, and I am satisfied of his complete innocence, and that he is entirely unaware of Madame de Corantin's objects and activities."

"Then what do you propose that we should do, Captain Clancey?"

"I propose nothing at all, Mr. Crane."

"What, after her getting those passports?"

Clancey twisted his moustache.

“BOBBY”

“That’s a matter which concerns spheres altogether over my head, Mr. Crane.”

“But Mr. Ramsey says that it’s entirely owing to Mr. Froelich’s introduction that he provided the lady with passports, that he’d known her through him, and having been a friend of Mr. Froelich for many years, he had implicitly trusted him. He was here only a few minutes before you came, and he told me that there was no doubt at all but that he had been the victim of a conspiracy between Froelich and this Madame de Corantin. He admitted that he ought to have been on his guard, considering that Mr. Froelich’s name was German, and of course it was natural that he would have German sympathies.”

“Um! And what do you think, Mr. Crane?”

The Assistant Commissioner was silent for a moment.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

"You see, I don't know Mr. Froelich," he said.

"But you do know Mr. Ramsey," replied Clancey.

"Not well."

"What about his chief? You know him well enough. Why not ask him?"

The Assistant Commissioner's answer was to throw a note across the table to his questioner. It ran as follows—

WAR OFFICE.

DEAR MR. CRANE,—

I desire you to take the most rigorous measures without fear or favour regarding this matter of the passports accorded to Madame de Corantin. There has been a disgraceful dereliction of duty, and I intend to make an example of the offender, whoever he may be.

Yours very truly,

ARCHIBALD FELLOWES.

Clancey whistled.

"That looks rather awkward for Master Alistair."

“BOBBY”

There was a knock on the door. It was Inspector Groombridge.

“Excuse me, sir, my man has just brought this. It was delivered by a stranger to the hall-porter of the building where Mr. Froelich occupies a flat.” He handed a letter to the Assistant Commissioner, who read it slowly and without comment passed it to Clancey. Clancey read it through, smiled, and passed it back.

“I think that settles it,” he remarked, “and with your kind permission I will now depart.”

Nodding farewell to the Assistant Commissioner, Clancey withdrew by the private exit opposite to the one which led into the room where Bobby was miserably awaiting his fate.

“Show Mr. Froelich in, Inspector Groombridge, and, by the way, I hope you have treated him with courtesy.”

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

The inspector cleared his throat.

"Oh, I think so, sir. Of course, it's rather difficult in these cases to make a gentleman comfortable, but I gave him a shake-down in my own private room for the night and sent a man for his toilet things and so on in the morning."

"Very well, Inspector; show him in at once."

Bobby came into the room; his expression was more bewildered than apprehensive. The Assistant Commissioner held out his hand, which Bobby took with a look of surprise.

"Do sit down, Mr. Froelich. I am so sorry to have troubled you. You will, I am sure, understand that in times like these one has to be very careful, and your acquaintance with Madame de Corantin——"

"Madame de Corantin!" Bobby exclaimed.
"What in the world——"

“BOBBY”

“One moment, Mr. Froelich. I’ll try and explain it to you. Madame de Corantin is known to us. She is a very clever emissary of the German Government, and she has succeeded in baffling us entirely up till now because by a chain of coincidences there has been no one who could identify her on the various occasions that she has been in England. Thanks to her influential connections, she has succeeded in obtaining information of considerable value, and has also been enabled to elude both the French authorities and ourselves. We have reason to believe that she has secured travelling facilities and passports through her relations with high Government officials, both French and English, whom she knew before the War. You will understand, therefore, that your acquaintance with her was at first sight a suspicious circumstance.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

I am glad to be able to tell you, however, that on inquiry we find that you are entirely innocent of any complicity with her plans, and this result of our investigations is confirmed by a letter which she apparently addressed to you."

Bobby's face had been growing longer and longer as the Assistant Commissioner proceeded. When Mr. Crane mentioned the letter Bobby could not restrain an exclamation.

"A letter?" he asked excitedly. "What letter?"

"This," said the Assistant Commissioner, handing him the note that Clancey and he had previously seen.

Bobby took it eagerly and read—

DEAR BOBBY, MY FRIEND,—

Once more I fear I am causing you unhappiness. I cannot explain everything, but I can at least tell you this. When I prevailed upon you to introduce Mr. Ramsey to me, so much against

“BOBBY.”

your will, I had an object. This object was very far from being a desire for Mr. Ramsey's acquaintance as you supposed, for I am still, and always shall be, devoted to that former friend of whom I told you. His name, I may now tell you, is Prince von Waldheim und Schlangenfurst. When I came to London I had hoped to have remained long enough to see you again, but I had no alternative but to go at a moment's notice. To have remained would have been dangerous.

This letter will be delivered to you by a person whom I can trust. By the time you get it I shall be in Holland.

Some day when peace is restored I hope we may meet, and it will give me great pleasure to see you and introduce you to Prince von Waldheim, who esteems loyalty as I do.

As to Mr. Ramsey I do not know which I despise most—his vanity or his stupidity.

With every good wish,

Believe me,

Always sincerely and gratefully yours,

FRANCINE DE CORANTIN.

As Bobby finished the letter he looked up and met the eyes of the Assistant Commissioner, who rose from his chair.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

“I need not detain you, Mr. Froelich; it only remains for me to apologize for any trouble I may have given you. I must ask you to be kind enough to lend me this letter, which, however, I shall send on to you in a few days.”

Bobby returned to his flat, relieved but chastened. It was not long before he received the commission he coveted. The same Gazette contained two announcements: one that a commission as lieutenant had been granted to Mr. J. Froelich, the other that his Majesty had no further use for the services of Mr. Alistair Ramsey.

A WAR VICTIM

VI

A WAR VICTIM

GILBERT BAXENDALE is at fifty what people call "a nice-looking man." He hardly seems any older than he did ten years ago, except that he is rather stouter below the belt, and that when he takes off his hat one notices that he is getting a little bald. His skin is pink and unwrinkled, and his hair and moustache are so light that one does not notice whether they are turning grey or not, and he looks as spruce as ever. Baxendale always has been particular about his appearance, and he is never so pleased as when you ask him the name of his tailor. But his

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

reply in that case is deprecating, implying that he doesn't think very much of him, do you? which is intended to draw further reassurance and compliment. On the other hand, if, inspired by the lustre of their beautiful polish, you should inquire where he gets his boots, his expression changes. Although boots are about as near a hobby as he has ever got, he is distressed about the shape of his feet, and says that his corns give him a lot of trouble. But he likes to talk about boots, and a recurring subject of conversation with him is the difficulty of finding a man who really understands doing them properly. He knows a great deal about blacking and brushes, and is no mean authority on the art of boning or polishing or varnishing refractory foot-gear of all kinds. To look at him one would think Baxendale has never had a

A WAR VICTIM

day's illness in his life, but as a matter of fact he has never been well since any one can remember. He has always suffered from what one may call ailments, and when one saw him at the club or in Bond Street he would tell you he was not quite the thing—he was run down or had lumbago or a bit of a chill on the liver.

Baxendale is very particular about cooking. He used to complain a good deal about the food at the club, but after his marriage he said it had improved, which no one could understand, as the kitchen staff has not been changed for twenty years. Freddy Catchpole said that once when he dined with them Mrs. Baxendale asked him about the club cook, because Gilbert was very dissatisfied with theirs. Servants worried Baxendale a great deal after he got married.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

He said they almost made him long for his bachelor days, when he did not know what domestic cares were.

The Baxendales live in one of those new, well-built houses in the neighbourhood of Grosvenor Square. It was some time before Baxendale could make up his mind to buy the lease of it. For a year or two he tried taking furnished houses alternately in the country and in town. Being a cautious man, he wanted to give both a good trial, but his wife finally made up his mind for him. She took no end of trouble in decorating and furnishing their house in some antique style. At first Baxendale seemed to be pleased. Every now and then he told men at the club how clever she was at picking up bargains; but after a time he got gloomy when one asked how the house was getting on. He said he had

A WAR VICTIM

met a man who had made a collection of antiques, and when he wanted to sell them he found they were all shams, and it nearly ruined him.

After it was all finished the Baxendales gave a house-warming party. Peter Knott said afterwards that Baxendale took him aside and confided to him that he wasn't at all pleased with the house. It faced west instead of south, and the drawing-room was so large one could never buy enough furniture to put in it, whereas his smoking-room was a rotten little hole you couldn't swing a cat in. Besides, it really was a mistake living in town; the country was much better for the health and less expensive on the whole, even if you had shooting and entertained a good deal. He had a great mind to sell the lease if he could get a good offer. Then he would have

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

a flat just to run up to when he wanted to stay in town for a week at a time and do the theatres.

The Baxendales have no children, and apparently no nephews, nieces, nor other youthful belongings in whom they take any special interest. One day Peter Knott met Baxendale playing golf with a young man whom he introduced to him as his nephew, Dick Barnard, but the youth did not reappear on any other occasion, and Peter remembers that Baxendale told him in confidence that the boy put on side and was cheeky.

Baxendale always tells things in confidence to people, and occasionally they happen to meet and compare notes; in this way they sometimes get to know what Baxendale thinks about them, and this does not add to his popularity. Baxendale retired from business after his

A WAR VICTIM

marriage, and invested his capital as remuneratively as security permitted. He came to the conclusion that as his wife's income, added to his own, provided all the money they needed, there was no object in boring himself by going to the City. After he gave up business, every week when in town Baxendale had certain obligations which filled up his time agreeably for him. For instance, he looked over the share list every morning to see that his and Mrs. Baxendale's investments were all right. He liked a pleasant object for a walk, so at least once a week he made a point of fetching his pass-book from the bank. One day Freddy Catchpole met him just as he was coming out, and he said he was awfully upset about his quarter's balance, which had never been so low before. Freddy told him he had never had a balance at the end

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

of a quarter in his life, and Baxendale replied that, at all events, that saved him anxiety about investing it.

There used to be lots of other ways in which Baxendale passed his time. There was always something or other to order at his tailor's or his shirtmaker's. He was never extravagant in these matters, but when he decided to get something he took time and trouble over it, and would go several times to try things on. He used to say that in this way he got quite a lot of exercise. On Saturdays and Sundays he and his wife sometimes motored down to play golf at one or the other of their clubs. Baxendale said since his marriage he was off his game, and it was really no fun playing with a woman. Mrs. Baxendale asked Peter Knott's advice about it. She said it was such a pity Gilbert lost his temper and

A WAR VICTIM

never would finish the round when she was one up, as the exercise really was good for him. During the racing season Baxendale generally managed to avoid golf and go down to Sandown or Kempton or Gatwick instead; he said he got just as much air and exercise there, and there was always a chance of paying your expenses. Sometimes he succeeded, as he was very careful; but whenever he failed he would say he'd chuck it up altogether, the game wasn't worth the candle.

In the winter Baxendale used at one time to take a shoot near London, but he gave it up because he got bored with looking after it and arranging parties. He said he was sick of being sponged on by men who never asked him back.

He complained a good deal about the snobbishness of people generally. Some-

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

body was always cutting or ignoring him, and then "look at the sort of men that one meets nowadays; fellows whose fathers keep shops and haven't an 'h' in their alphabets." He couldn't understand how people could stand the cads that went about; yet you could go into the Ritz or the Carlton and see the Countess of Daventry and Lady FitzStuart lunching and dining with "bounders like that fellow Clutterbuck."

After his marriage Baxendale became absorbed more and more by his wife's family. He seemed to be impressed especially by old Sir Robert and Jack Barnard, his wife's uncle and brother. Whatever Jack did interested Baxendale, and whatever he said Baxendale repeated in confidence to most of his acquaintances. Of course Jack is a romancer, but Baxendale never knows whether to

A WAR VICTIM

believe him or not, and Jack, being aware of this, concocts imposing fairy tales for Baxendale's benefit. Sir Robert is supposed to be very rich, and the amount of his fortune and what he is going to do with it are matters of deep concern to Baxendale, who made a habit of calling on him daily and constantly inviting him to dinner. He told Peter Knott he was sorry for the old man being so lonely, and that his wife was his favourite niece and much attached to him; but Jack declared that his uncle was horribly mean, and only tolerated Baxendale because he could get dinner at his house for nothing.

At the beginning of the War Baxendale began complaining about his nerves. Somehow he didn't enjoy his food and couldn't get a proper night's sleep. He'd tried Benger's Food last thing at night

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

and Quaker Oats for breakfast, but nothing seemed to do him any good.

The curious part of Baxendale's illness was that he continued to look perfectly well, but he seemed to get offended if people said so; what really touched him was pity. There's a man at the club called Funkelstein whom everybody supposed was a German, but now he says he's Dutch. Just after the War broke out, Baxendale told every one confidentially he was a spy, but, to our surprise, they suddenly became quite friendly. It seemed that Funkelstein also suffered from nerves. Baxendale said he was most sympathetic to him personally, and alluded to him as "poor Funkelstein." As time went on Baxendale's nerves grew worse, and it was thought he must have been badly hit financially by the War, till Peter Knott told us that he had invested most

A WAR VICTIM

of his wife's and his own money in shipping companies and coal-mine debentures which had done nothing but rise ever since the War began. On the strength of this satisfactory information Baxendale was occasionally approached for subscriptions; but his response was generally evasive, or the amount offered so minute that he felt compelled to explain it by expressing his apprehensions about new taxation and the insane extravagance of the Government.

After a time Baxendale told us he could hardly bear to open a paper; he never knew what he might read next, and he felt he could not stand any more shocks. That made us suppose he had a brother or some near relative at the Front, and for some days we were rather apologetic in our attitude towards him, as, what with the War and our own anxieties, we

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

had shown some indifference to Baxendale's nerves.

But one day Jack Barnard turned up as a major in khaki, and said something so rude to his brother-in-law, who was sitting in the corner with Funkelstein, that the latter turned pale and left the room hurriedly. It appeared afterwards that Jack had got his back up against "that blighter Gilbert" because he hadn't done a thing for Dick, who had been at Sandhurst, and was now with his regiment in France. "It wasn't as though the selfish swine had kids of his own or some one else's whom he cared about. Not a soul. Sickening, I call it. He didn't even say good-bye to him or ask after him."

Later on Baxendale developed a habit of questioning every one as to what they

A WAR VICTIM

were doing. On one occasion he asked Postlethwaite, who runs a convalescent home at Margate, if there was anything he could do down there. Postlethwaite suggested that he might drive wounded soldiers down to Margate in his car if he liked. Baxendale said he'd think it over, but when Postlethwaite had gone he asked Peter Knott in confidence if he didn't think it was taking advantage of people to mess up their cars like that.

Another time he tackled old Colonel Bridge, who had been up all night doing special constable duty, and was not in the sweetest of tempers. When Baxendale asked him what he was doing he told him he'd better come round to the police-station at three the next morning and see for himself.

Baxendale has not turned up at the

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

club since, and we were all hoping he had found suitable employment. This happens to nearly every one sooner or later except to us seniors. But it had not happened to Baxendale; for Freddy Catchpole, who has managed to get a job at the War Office, dined one evening with Mrs. Baxendale, and she told him poor Gilbert had got so bad with his nerves that he had to go to a nursing-home in the country to take a cure. And there, for all I know, he will stay till the War is over.

DULCE ET DECORUM

VII

DULCE ET DECORUM

DAVID SAUNDERSON lived on the top floor of one of the few lofty buildings in Chelsea, and as his years increased, the ascent of the five flights of stairs became a serious matter. His heart was none too sound, and the three minutes he once needed to reach his attic from the ground floor had already become five when the War began.

With the first shock of battles the emaciated remains of his bedridden brother were borne down the steep stairs and out of the little flat he had not left for the last five years of his life.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

The two had lived together since Philip had returned from India as a man of fifty, with the reasonable hope of enjoying his pensioned retirement. Philip had spent his energy freely in the Indian Civil Service, and the two middle-aged brothers, either too poor to marry, too shy, or both, determined to combine resources with companionship and keep house together.

For a time they sailed contentedly downstream. Philip's public spirit and industrious habits would not permit of what he called "a life of indolent ease." He rose early and put in a good eight hours' day at various unpaid labours. He became churchwarden of the parish, joined the vestry, and was a much valued unit of that obscure element in the population which does a great part of the public work for which individuals of a less modest type get the recognition.

DULCE ET DECORUM

David earned his living as a journalist and literary hack. He had never done or been anything else in his life, although to his small circle he loved, in a guileless way, to convey the impression that his youthful performances had been of no little brilliance.

He would mention the names of the celebrated editors by whom he had been employed as literary or dramatic critic, and was never tired of eulogizing these and other lettered heroes for whom he had slaved in the distant past. He insisted on the appreciation that these forgotten lions had shown of his work; but, however that might be, its manifestation had certainly never been translated into terms of cash, for within no one's memory had David's pecuniary resources been other than exiguous.

He was a great lover of the Arts, but

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

his tastes were catholic and he worshipped at many shrines. He had no great patience with those who admire the modern to the exclusion of the old, or whose allegiance to one school precludes acceptance of another. He held his arms wide open and embraced Art in all its manifestations.

He was a great hero-worshipper ; there was no sort of achievement he did not admire, but he had his special favourites ; generally these were successful playwrights or novelists whose work he revised for publication at a minimum rate and whose additional recognition, in the form of a back seat for a first night or a signed presentation copy, produced in him a quite inordinate gratitude.

David Saunderson was the embodiment of ponderousness ; he spoke as slowly as he moved his cumbersome limbs. So gradual

DULCE ET DECORUM

were his mental processes that his friends forbore to ask him questions, knowing that they would not have time to wait for his replies. For these reasons the agile in body and mind avoided encounters with him, but if he chanced to meet them where there was no escape they would evade him by cunning or invent transparent excuses which only one so artless as he would have believed.

Now and then he paid visits to old friends who were sometimes caught unawares. Then he would settle his huge bulk in an arm-chair, and his head, bald except for a fringe of grey hair about the ears, seemed to sink into his chest, upon which the bearded chin reposed as though the whole affair were too heavy to support. At such times he gave one the impression of a massive fixture which could be about as easily moved as a

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

grand piano, and his hosts would resign themselves to their fate.

If any one had the temerity to provoke him to discussion, he would wait patiently for an opening, and once he secured it, would maintain his opinion steadily, the even, dispassionate voice slowly wearing down all opposition.

He was not without humour and a certain shrewdness in judging men and things, and would smile tolerantly when views were advanced with which he disagreed. It was not difficult to make merry at his expense, for he suspected no one, and only those who spoke ill of their neighbours disturbed his equanimity. Towards cynics his attitude was compassionate.

Directly war broke out David enrolled himself in the special volunteer corps of artists raised by an eminent Academician.

DULCE ET DECORUM

He took his duties very seriously, and was at great pains to master the intricacies of squad-drill. He never admitted that some of the exercises, especially the one that consists in lying on the ground face downwards and raising yourself several times in succession by your arms, were trying to a man of his weight and proportions, but about the time he was beginning to pride himself on his military proficiency Philip's death occurred. He said little about it and quietly occupied himself with the funeral and with settling his dead brother's small affairs, but the battalion were little surprised when shortly afterwards his resignation followed on medical grounds.

The Saundersons were connected with a family of some distinction, the head of which, knowing that Philip's pension died with him and that David's earnings

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

were smaller than ever since the War, would gladly have offered him some pecuniary assistance. But David's pride equalled his modesty, and Peter Knott had to be charged with the mission of approaching him.

One afternoon Peter found David in his attic going through his dead brother's papers and smoking a pipe. Peter knew his man too well to attempt direct interrogation. He felt his way by inquiries as to the general situation of Art, and David was soon enlarging on the merits of sundry unknown but gifted painters and craftsmen whose work he hoped Peter might bring to the notice of his wealthy friends.

"The poor fellows are starving, Knott," he said in his leisurely way as he raised himself painfully from his chair and walked heavily to a corner where lay a portfolio.

DULCE ET DECORUM

Every piece of furniture in the small sitting-room was littered with a heterogeneous collection of manuscripts and books ; the latter were piled up everywhere. David slowly removed some from a table and laid the folio upon it.

“Now, here’s—a charming—etching.” He had a way of saying a word or two and then pausing as though to take breath, which demanded great patience of a listener.

Peter stood by him and examined it, David meanwhile puffing at his pipe.

“The man—who did that—is one of our best line engravers—his name is Macmanus—he’s dreadfully hard up—look at this.”

He held another before his visitor.

“That’s by Plimsoll—a silver point— isn’t it a beautiful thing?”

“Delightful,” replied Peter.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

“Well, do you know—Knott—that——” David’s pipe had gone out. He moved slowly towards his chair and began looking for the matches. “Do you know, Plimsoll is one of the most gifted” — he was holding a match to his pipe as he spoke — “gifted young artists in the country — and two days ago — he — was literally hungry——” David took his pipe from his mouth and looked at Peter to see the effect of his words.

“It’s very sad, very” — Peter Knott’s tone was sympathetic — “but after all, they’re young; they could enlist, couldn’t they?”

David sat down in his chair and pulled at his pipe reflectively before answering.

“They’re—neither of them—strong, Knott. They’d—be laid up in a week.”

“Um—hard luck that,” Peter Knott agreed. “But what’s to be done? Everybody’s

DULCE ET DECORUM

in the same boat. The writers now, I wager they're just as badly hit, aren't they?"

"That depends——" David paused, and Peter gave him time to finish his sentence. "The occasional — er — contributors — are having a bad time—but the regular journalists—the people on the staffs—are all right—of course I know cases—there's a man called—er, let me see—I've got a letter from him somewhere—Wyatt's his name—now, he's——" David's huge body began to rise again gradually. Peter Knott stopped him.

"By the way," he remarked briskly, "I saw your friend Seaford yesterday."

David had subsided, and once more began relighting his pipe; he looked up at the name.

"Frank Seaford—oh, did you? How is he? I haven't seen him for some time——"

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

"So I gathered," Peter remarked dryly. "He seems to be getting on very well since Ringsmith took him up."

"Ah! Ringsmith's right. He's a beautiful—artist. Did you—see——"

Peter interrupted. "I think I've seen all Seaford's work. Anyhow he owes his recognition entirely to you. I introduced him to Ringsmith entirely on your recommendation two years ago. He's sold a lot of pictures during that time. When did you see him last, Saunderson?"

David stroked his beard thoughtfully.

"Let me see—some time before the War—it must have been—more than a year ago."

"Not very grateful," Peter could not help rapping out.

David stopped smoking, and seemed to rouse himself.

"You're quite wrong, Knott. He sent me—that exquisite study—on the wall

DULCE ET DECORUM

yonder." He pointed as he spoke to a small drawing in water colours.

Peter got up, looked at it a moment, and shrugged his shoulders.

"If you're satisfied, I've got nothing to say."

"Satisfied—of course I'm satisfied——" A tolerant, almost condescending smile stole over David's eyes and mouth. "You don't understand—artists, Knott."

"Perhaps not, perhaps not." Knott pulled out his watch. "Anything doing in your own line, Saunderson?" he asked in a tone of careful indifference.

David puffed at his pipe.

"I'm not very busy—but—you know—that's rather a good thing—now I'm a special constable."

Peter Knott's single eyeglass wandered over the unwieldy frame sitting opposite him.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

"A special constable?" he echoed.

David puffed complacently.

"Sergeant," he replied.

Peter Knott dropped his glass.

"Really, you know, Saunderson. For a man at your time of life, and obliged to work for his living, it's——" He hesitated. "Well, you oughtn't to do it."

David smiled in a superior way.

"That's just where—you're wrong—Knott—we relieve the—younger men—that's our job—and I'm proud to——"

Peter Knott's kindly old eyes twinkled at the thought of David tackling a lusty cracksman, twinkled and then became grave.

"Supposing you get laid up, injured in some way?" he asked.

"We don't think about that." David's expression was serene. "I go on—duty at—two—very quiet then—lovely it is—on

DULCE ET DECORUM

fine nights—when I've been working—to get out—into the cool air——”

As David spoke Peter Knott pulled out his watch again and then got up.

“I saw your cousin Herbert a few days ago, Saunderson. He said he hadn't seen you for a long time, wondered whether you'd go down to Rendlesham for a few weeks. He wants a catalogue of his prints, and there are some old manuscripts he would like your opinion about. I'm going down this week-end. What shall I tell him?”

David put down his pipe.

“Tell him—I'm much obliged—later on perhaps—I can't—leave my duties—while these Zeppelin scares last. They need experienced men—one doesn't know what—may happen.” He had got on his feet and had gradually reached the door of the tiny flat. “Good-bye, Knott,” he said

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

as he took the other's hand. "Don't forget—about Macmanus and—Plimsoll——"

His visitor was two flights below when David called to him—

"If you happen—to hear of—a secretary-ship—Wyatt's——"

But by the time he got the words out Peter Knott was out of hearing.

In due course Peter Knott reported the result of his visit to Sir Herbert Saunderson. The latter, a kindly man with an income barely enough for the responsibilities a large family entailed on him, took counsel with his old friend as to what could be done next. There was reason for believing that David's stolid silence regarding his own concerns concealed a general impecuniousness quite as pronounced as that of the artist friends whose cause he pleaded.

"Why not send him the prints with a

DULCE ET DECORUM

cheque on account and say you need the catalogue soon, as you may make up your mind to sell them?"

"A capital idea," replied the other, and the suggestion was promptly carried into effect.

One winter morning, some months afterwards, a seedy-looking individual called at Portland Place with a typewritten letter, requiring an answer.

Sir Herbert Saunderson, busy reading and signing letters, tossed it over to his secretary. The young lady read it aloud according to rule.

DEAR HERBERT [it ran],—

I have finished the catalogue, but there are one or two details which I should like to settle before sending it to the printers. My friend Mr. Wyatt, who has been kindly helping me with the work since my little accident, will explain the different points to you and take your instructions,

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

I am so sorry I can't come myself, but Mr. Wyatt is thoroughly competent and I can strongly recommend him if you have any other work of an analogous character.

Yours ever,

D. S.

The one ear with which Sir Herbert Saunderson was listening while he went on signing the papers before him had caught part though not all of the letter.

"Did I hear the word 'accident,' Miss Milsome?" he asked, looking up.

"Yes, Sir Herbert."

"How did it happen? Let's have a look."

The busy man glanced through it.

"Send for Mr. Wyatt, please."

The seedy little man entered and was asked courteously to seat himself.

"What has happened to my cousin?" asked Sir Herbert.

Mr. Wyatt seemed embarrassed by the question.

DULCE ET DECORUM

“The fact is, Sir Herbert,” he began hesitatingly, “Mr. Saunderson didn’t want much said about that. His great wish is that I should be given certain necessary data regarding the catalogue, but to tell you the truth——”

Mr. Wyatt stopped. There was a note of anxiety in his pleasant, cultivated voice.

Sir Herbert Saunderson and Miss Milsome exchanged glances.

“Pray don’t hesitate to tell me if anything is wrong with my cousin, Mr. —er——”

“Wyatt,” added Miss Milsome softly.

“I’m afraid he’s rather bad.”

The little man looked at Miss Milsome as he spoke. Her expression was sympathetic, and he continued—

“You know, I believe, that he has been a special constable?”

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

Sir Herbert Saunderson nodded.

"As sergeant, he had charge of the arrangements for reducing the lighting of the streets in his own district. One evening, about a month ago, he was returning from duty, when he slipped on a curbstone owing to the darkness. Fortunately it was close to his own place, and he was able, though with difficulty, to make his way slowly up to his flat. When I got there in the morning, at our usual hour for work, he was in great pain. He had injured his arm and right hand—twisted it in some way so that it was quite useless——"

Mr. Wyatt paused.

"I hope you sent for a doctor?" There was evident apprehension in Sir Herbert's question.

"He absolutely refused to have one. He said he was only one of the light casual-

DULCE ET DECORUM

ties, and that doctors must be spared in these times for important cases. He gave me quite a lecture about it. The charwoman came in with a laudanum dressing from the chemist, who, he said, was a friend of his, and just as good as a doctor."

"But this is madness—simple madness!" Sir Herbert's voice was agitated.

"Oh, his hand soon got better," the little man broke in, "and the pain gradually eased off. In a couple of days he went on working again, but of course he couldn't write. He joked about it. He seemed to like thinking he was in a sort of way in the firing line, as though he was slightly wounded."

Mr. Wyatt laughed very softly.

"But I must see to this at once. Miss Milsome, kindly ring up Dr. Freeman. Tell him I'll call for him." Sir Herbert

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

looked at his table, covered with papers, and then at his watch. His fine mouth closed firmly. "Now, at once, as soon as he can be ready."

Miss Milsome took the telephone from the stand beside her.

Sir Herbert Saunderson rose hurriedly and rang the bell.

"The car, at once!" he ordered as the servant entered.

"It's his heart I'm afraid of," said Mr. Wyatt. He was sitting on the front seat of the landaulette, facing Sir Herbert Saunderson and Dr. Freeman. "I don't think he knows how bad he is."

They were already in Chelsea.

"I think it will be better if Mr. Wyatt and I go up together first," the doctor suggested as they arrived at the door. "If his heart is weak, a sudden emotion might be injurious."

DULCE ET DECORUM

"I quite agree," Sir Herbert replied. "In fact, you need not mention my presence. I only want to know your opinion. Now that he will be in good hands I shall feel relieved."

The doctor jumped out. Sir Herbert detained the other an instant.

"Please keep me informed, Mr. Wyatt. I'm very much indebted to you for telling me about this and for your care of my cousin."

Mr. Wyatt acknowledged the courteous utterance with a deprecating gesture as they shook hands and followed quickly after the doctor, who was proceeding slowly up the steep staircase.

Sir Herbert Saunderson buried himself in *The Times*, always placed in his car. Suddenly he was disturbed. Mr. Wyatt, pale and hatless, stood on the pavement.

WAR-TIME SILHOUETTES

“We were too late!” He uttered the words in a whisper, which ended in a gulp.

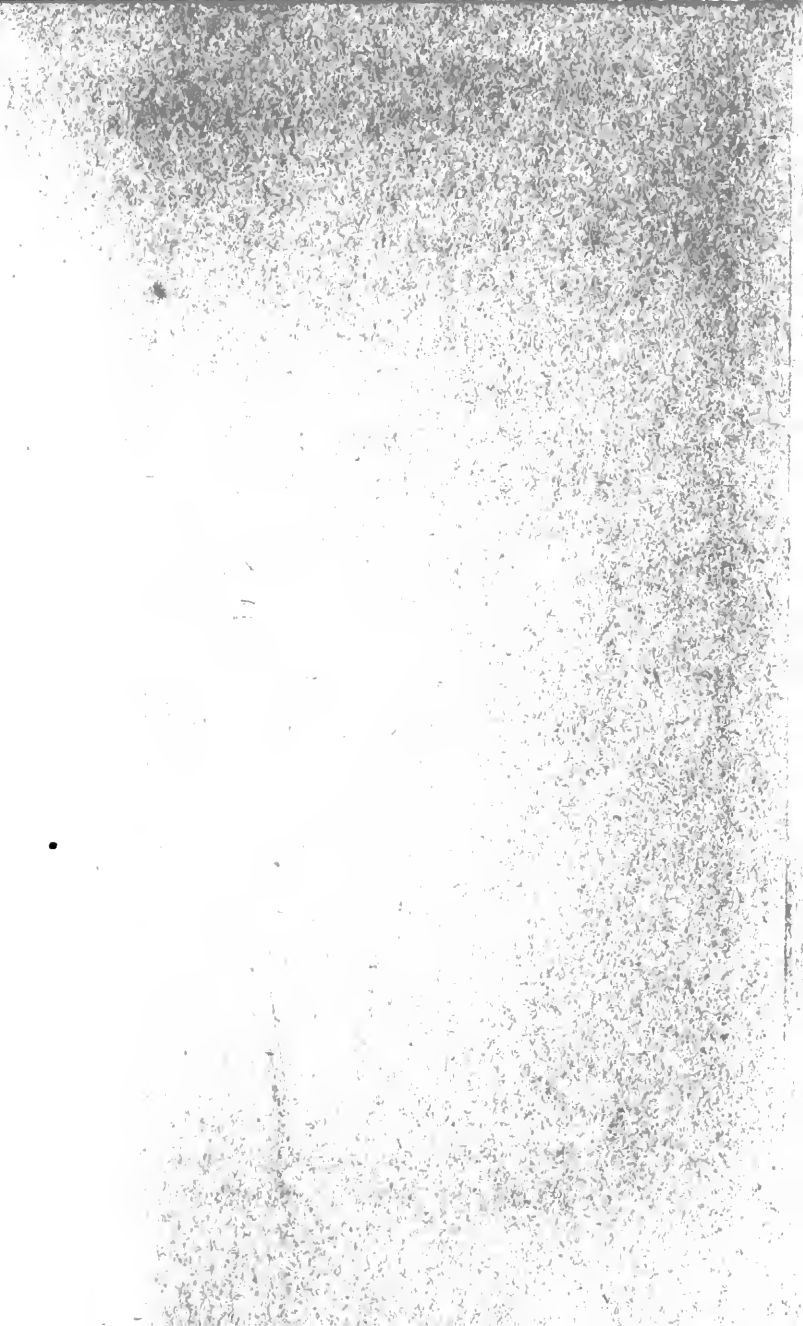
The awed face told its own tale. Sir Herbert got out of his car and followed him without a word.

At the bedside the three men stood silently, reverently looking down on David Saunderson.

On his face that happy, superior smile seemed to say to them: “What a lucky fellow I am to have the best of it like this—and Wyatt provided for, too!”

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